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Western Story Magazine

WINNERS OF WESTERN MILLIONS By Edward H. Smith
(COLLIS P. HUNTINGTON)

Ernest Haycox
Clem Yore
George Gilbert
Herbert Farris
and others

BIG, CLEAN STORIES OF OUTDOOR LIFE

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EDGAR FRANKLIN WITTMACK 1925

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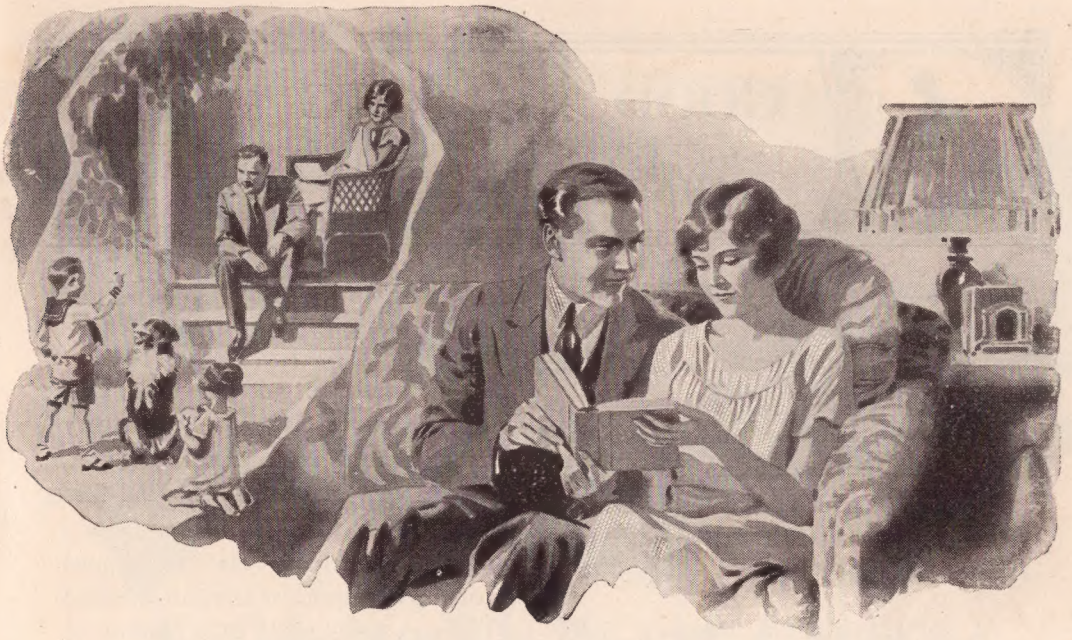

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HOW *the* girl has changed your outlook on life! Before you met her, there seemed not so much to work for—a place to sleep, food, clothes, a party now and then at the pace the other fellows went. With health and enough money to spend on yourself, why shouldn't you be content?

Then the sweetheart came—ready to place her youth and hope and beauty beside you for all the years. Marriage? A little frank figuring together one night detected the fallacy in Cupid's ready slogan: "Two can live more cheaply than one."

And now, for the first time perhaps, you are seriously considering where the job is taking you; just what lies beyond Tomorrow.

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GOOD READING

BY

CHARLES HOUSTON

Jamieson was tired. It had been a hard day at the office. Somewhere, somehow, an important letter had been lost, and one of the firm's best customers had stormed over the telephone. The Old Man had come in with a grouch and kept it all day. Jamieson's stenographer had left early, suffering from a headache.

At home that night Jamieson wandered restlessly through the living room. His nerves were on edge. He looked forward with dread to the time when he should go to his bedroom and lie with open eyes, staring at the ceiling until it was streaked with the first gray fingers of dawn.

And then his eyes fell on a book on the living-room table. Now Jamieson was no great reader. He would race through the newspapers in the morning and on his way home, flip the pages of an occasional magazine, glance hastily at some of the latest books that had to do with his business. Rarely did he sit down and read a book for the sheer pleasure of it. But to-night, with every nerve in him jigging away and a great distaste for his mode of life filling him with a profound sense of depression, anything that would take his mind off his worries was to be welcomed.

He took up the book and went over to the big, padded chair by the fire. Indifferently he opened the cloth-bound volume with its gayly colored jacket and started to read.

When Jamieson got up from that chair a few hours later, he was a very different person from that fagged-out, nerve-whipped individual who had first sat there. For Jamieson had gone on a wonderful adventure. He had stepped out of the monotony of life into a world of romance and thrill. The author of the book had reached out through the magic of printed words and transported Jamieson to a realm where anything might happen and indeed did happen with surprising swiftness. Jamieson's mind was swept clean of its morbid fears. He forgot all the petty annoyances of the day. He regained self-respect and courage by the very business of reading about the greater struggles of the characters in the book.

To-day Jamieson has the reading habit and is proud of it. He is a great booster of good fiction and has a way of dropping in on his dealer and asking for the latest Chelsea House title. He knows that books carrying the Chelsea House brand on their jackets are the sort of books that are a sure cure for the blues.

All over this country to-day, Jamiesons who have never read much before are getting the reading habit. They have discovered the "dear delights" of the good story well told and they know

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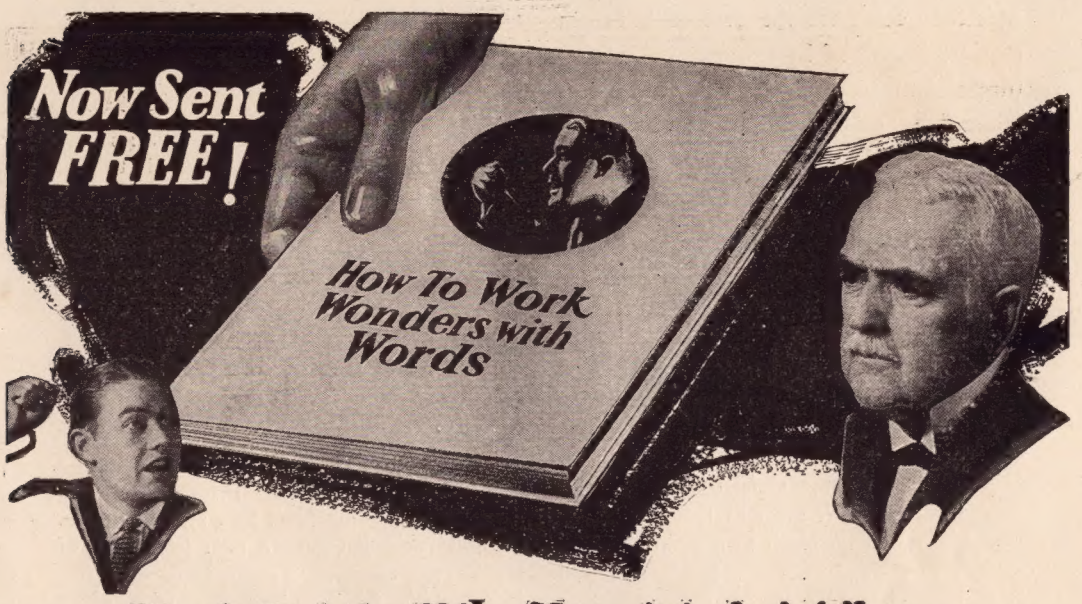

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that they can have the best of Western stories, stories of love, romance, adventure and mystery at absurdly low prices when they ask for Chelsea House books. Here follow brief close-ups of some of the latest Chelsea House offerings:

THE PHANTOM ALIBI, by Henry Leverage. Published by Chelsea House, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City. Price 75 cents.

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The amazing manner in which he got at the truth about the murder, and finally put his competent hands on the real culprit, makes the sort of detective story that comes along once in a blue moon. You won't be happy until you find out who killed Knight's brother, once you have started this fascinating yarn.

TWO-GUN GERTA, by C. C. Waddell and Carroll John Daly. Published by Chelsea House, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City. Price 75 cents.

This book has in it all the swing and go of what they call "good continuity" in the movies. It's about a movie cowboy who suddenly finds himself up against some very stern realities when he goes to work for Miss Gerta O'Beirne, likewise known as "Two-Gun Gerta." Gerta has a ranch the other side of the Mexican border and she just plumb kidnaps movie "Red" Conners to get him down there to work for her.

When Red arrived in a somewhat unconventional manner, he found all sorts of puzzles to be solved. Where was all the money coming from for the running of that ranch? Where——

But you go ahead and see if you can answer some of the many engaging mysteries that this book contains. You'll love Gerta and want to have Red for a buddy.

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One night my spirits were at their lowest ebb. I could stand it no longer. Anything was better than that lonely room. I wandered out into the deserted streets.

Suddenly the sound of jazz and happy laughter caught my ear. Through the open window I could see the party.

Everything seemed to center around the young man playing the piano—Tom Buchanan. How I envied him! He had all the things I longed for—*but didn't have!* I was just an outsider.

All the way home I kept thinking of that scene through the window. The next evening I dropped in to see Tom. He greeted me cordially and to amuse me he played the piano. When he had finished, I said enviously:

"Tom, I would give anything to play the piano like that. I wish I had had a teacher when I was a kid—like you!"

Tom smiled and said, "Dick, I never had a teacher in my life! In fact, not so long ago, I couldn't play a note."

"Impossible," I explained. "How did you do it?"

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Three days later they arrived. I was amazed! I never dreamed that playing the piano could be so simple—even easier than Tom had pictured it.

The course was as much fun as a game. And as the lessons continued they got easier. Although I never had any "talent" I was playing my favorites—almost before I knew it. Nothing stopped me. I soon could play jazz, ballads, classical numbers, all with equal ease.

Then came the night that proved the turning point of my whole life. Once more I was going to a party, and this time I had something to offer.

What a moment that was when our hostess, apparently troubled, exclaimed:

"Isn't it a shame that Tom Buchanan can't be here. What will we do without someone to play the piano?"

Amazed at my confidence, I spoke up.

"I'll try to fill Tom's place—if you're not too critical."

Everyone seemed surprised. "Why I didn't know he played!" someone behind whispered.

Quietly I sat down and ran my fingers over the keys. As I struck the first rippling chords of Nevin's lovely "Narcissus," a hush fell over the room. I could hardly believe it, but—I was holding the party spellbound.

When I finished, you should have heard them applaud! Everyone insisted that I play more. Only too glad, I played piece after piece. I—who had been an outsider—was now the life of the party!

Before the evening was over, I had been invited to three more parties. Now I never have a lonesome moment. At last I am popular. And to think it was all so easy!

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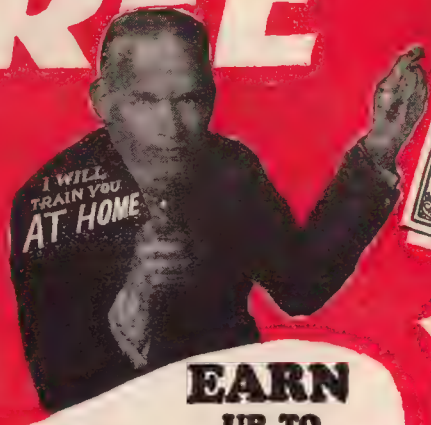

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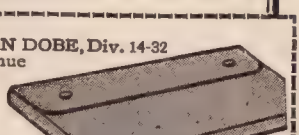

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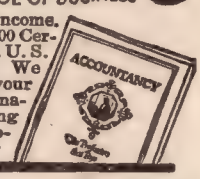

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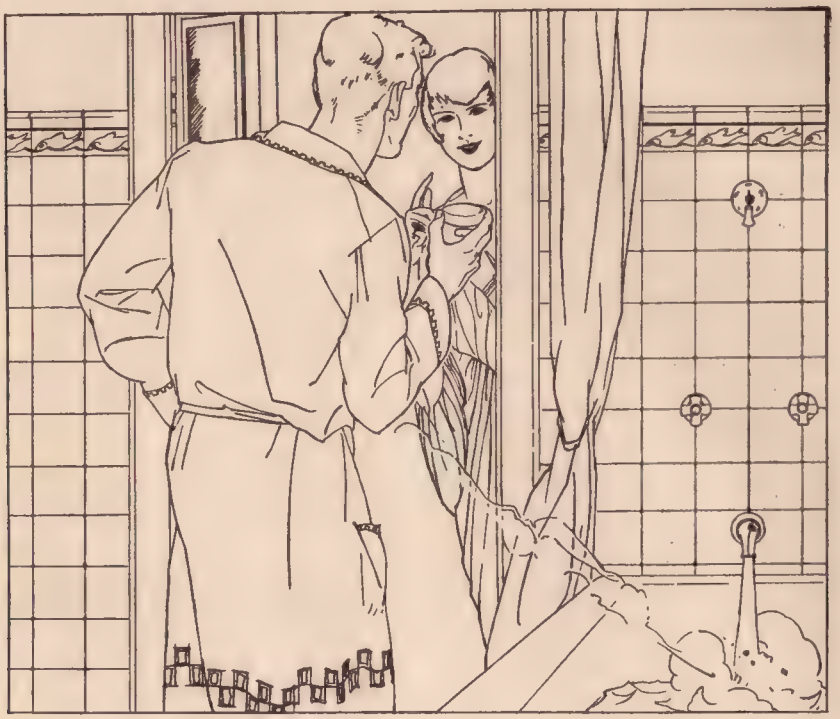

"You can't keep a good soap down!" *

THIS is a libelous portrait of a man of our acquaintance whose wife (gentle economist) tantalized him by the promise of Ivory for his bath—*as soon as he had used up his cake of sinker-soap!*

Unwilling to do further submarine searching for his leaden but elusive soap globule, yet loath to cross his smiling wife's wishes, our friend proceeded as follows:

1. Borrowed a cake of Ivory from his daughter.
2. Cemented sinker-soap to Ivory cake.

"It Floats"

3. Placed the ill-mated pair in bath water, and proved Ivory a life-saver, as shown.

At the present writing, the wedded soaps are wafer-thin—the sinker-soap from dissolution, the Ivory from lather-giving generosity; and thus one man has demonstrated the falsity of the adage that "you cannot eat your cake and have it, too."

PROCTER & GAMBLE

*In using this headline, we bow acknowledgment to hundreds of correspondents from coast to coast.

IVORY SOAP

99 44/100 % Pure

Luxury and economy are wedded in Guest Ivory—for wives who treasure their complexions. Guest Ivory costs only 5 cents because so many women won't use anything else.

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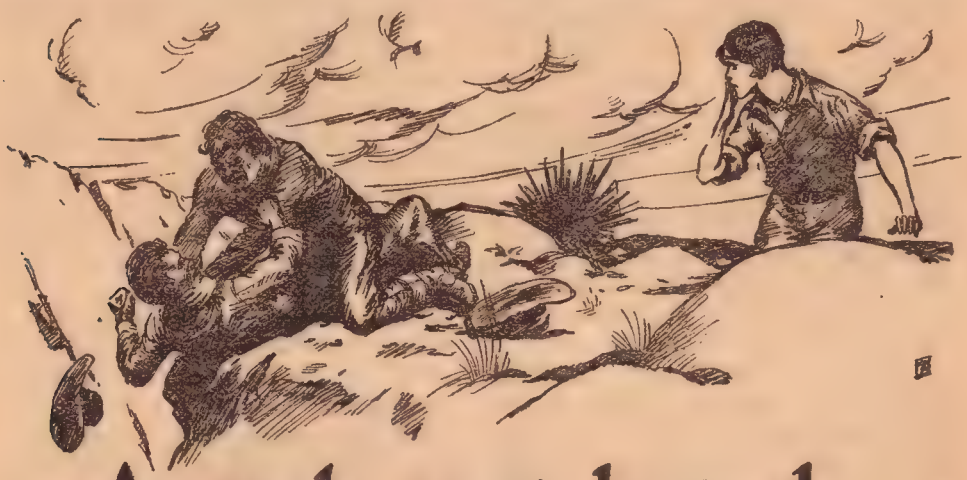


Ambushed

By Ernest Haycox

Author of "Dippity Sheriff to Boot," etc.

CHAPTER I.

"SMILING" CHAVIS MOVES SUDDENLY.

IT was very early in the morning. The night fog, just lifting above the top of the barn, was dissipated by a fresh sun that crept over the cañon's rim and sparkled brilliantly on the clear, shallow creek below. If ever there was an oasis in a land of drought and barren earth, the ranch on Murderer's Creek was such, and it seemed that "Smiling" Ben Chavis was fully enjoying the sight. He had just finished with breakfast and, with his cigar burning nicely, had taken his customary seat on the porch, looking across the clearing strewn with ranch gear to the corrals beyond. Above him, the cañon slashed a tortuous path toward the summit of the pine-clad mountains, eighteen miles to the skyline meadows. Below, the foothills fell into the desert—the cañon and its precious waters lost in a succession of rolling dunes and bald buttes. Here, alone, did the high walls of red and brown earth spread apart to let the creek fork around a small island; here, alone, did

the grass grow lushly along the water's edge and poplars throw their shade over the ground. It was a place where a man might live comfortably, and Smiling Ben Chavis might well relax and smoke his cigar in pleasure. From his vantage point, he could see the stage road winding precariously upward—circling points of rock, hanging dizzily to the sheer bluff side and, at last, vanishing among the stunted pines.

Mrs. Chavis had long been at work within the house, clearing away the dishes. A young girl of about eight was churning in the milk house by the creek and a lad, not much older, had been put to work weeding the garden. Out by the corral the top hand, Wes, was driving the stock to water, and the other hired hand, a shabby nondescript with the pseudonym of "Itchy" was pretending at a job on the bridge. Chavis knocked the ashes from the cigar, tolerantly amused at the man's shiftless antics.

"Itchy," he called, "you're a plumb loafin' rascal. Been all mornin' puttin' six spikes in that plank."

The man twisted his neck and grinned, white teeth flashing strangely against an unkempt, sun-blackened face. "Yeh, I'm havin' difficulties. This ain't a snap like you'd think, Mr. Chavis," he protested.

Mrs. Chavis put her head through the kitchen door. "Ben, I'm clean out of wood. Will you pack me in an armful before the fire dies?" she asked.

"Sure," said the man. "Right away, honey." But he made no effort to move. The ineffectual efforts of Itchy seemed to draw his mirth. Indeed, all the world presented a pleasant aspect to Chavis, and the furrows of humor deepened at the corners of his eyes.

As one looked casually at the man, he appeared like any other rancher of the region—with a bold, tanned face set off by a hat and a vest hanging loosely from his shoulders. But the chin was not as square nor the cast of the face as aggressive as those of most of his neighbors, and the color of his eyes was something that a reader of character would have noticed.

Itchy scrambled to his feet and retreated from the bridge, scratching at his arm and leaving his hammer on the plank. There was a thudding of hoofs back in the pines, and presently a rider cantered in view, coming from the main road and crossing the bridge. He gave Itchy a noncommittal look and pressed on to the porch, raising a hand, Indian-fashion, to Chavis.

"Mornin'," said he. "When you goin' to quit feedin' that useless critter?"—pointing to Itchy. "Used to work on the Box Arrow, but it took two other hands to keep him out of trouble. For that matter I guess he's nigh exhausted the patience of all the ranchers around here."

Chavis rolled his cigar between his thumb, chuckling. "The man amuses me. Ain't often you can find a natural-born clown," he said.

The newcomer grunted. "Reckon that wouldn't make up for all the trouble he causes. I wouldn't have him. But that's neither here ner there. By the way, did you know that your fence was down below Sentinel Rock? I drove five critters of yours back through it. Better fix it before your lower herd gets into mischief," the man advised.

"Thanks," said Chavis. "I been meanin' to get at that all week. Will send Itchy down with the wire puller to-day. How's tricks in town?" The newcomer bowed in the saddle, and raised his hat. From the corner of his eye, Chavis saw his wife cross the porch and return with her arms full of wood. "Hardly had time to do anything lately, been so busy," he added.

"Oh, I reckon that it'll keep, providin' a sandstorm don't blow it across the tracks," said the newcomer. "Sometimes I figger it's goin' to grow, an'

again I think that it's dryin' up. What this country needs is a plumb good shot o' dynamite."

"Dynamite," observed Chavis, enjoying his epigram, "costs money, an' folks here ain't oppressed with that article."

"Ain't it the truth. Say, you lost any critters lately?" The newcomer looked at Chavis significantly, and added in a lower tone, "I don't mean strayed, I mean *lost*."

"Why," said Chavis blandly, "I hardly know. You folks havin' trouble?"

The newcomer nodded. "Critters are gettin' so that they can't stay branded right. Well, there'll come a day when that's changed. We stopped it once an' we'll stop it again." He swung the horse around. "Got to go. Better look after the fence. Good-by." And he cantered over the clearing and crossed the bridge at a smart gallop. The pony's foot struck Itchy's hammer and the implement sailed neatly into the creek, while the nondescript one danced along the bank and went through all the motions of angry grief, without uttering a word. Chavis, chuckling, watched the man through half-closed lids. By and by, he rose and went into the house. One corner of the front room he reserved as a kind of office and, pulling up a chair to a desk, he began to run through the papers strewn in the pigeonholes and affixed to various spikes. Whatever it was that he wanted, he seemed unable to find it. And, after a half hour or better of desultory searching, swept everything toward the rear and got up to range around the room.

Mrs. Chavis crossed the kitchen and stood on the threshold of the living room. "Ben," said she, "I don't want to nag, but I've got to remind you again about the pump. It's throwing water something scandalous, and I get a regular shower bath every time I fill the bucket. Can't you find ten minutes to put in a new gasket?"

"Sure, honey, I'll have Itchy after it this minute," he promised.

"Itchy? Do be serious. Why, he'd end by taking every blessed thing apart. I'd ask Wes, but he's real busy. Ben, you just must take a little interest. What's come over you the last month or two?" his wife asked.

He smiled and took a fleeting glimpse of his wife. "Reckon it must be the summer's heat. Honey, you look powerful handsome, standin' pert just like that."

She could not help smiling at the shrewd compliment, even though she knew the man well enough to understand its emptiness. But she did make a striking figure—face a little flushed from the kitchen, eyes soberly anxious at his disinterest. She may have been thirty or a little more, but certainly she did not look it, despite the long and hard labor she had expended as a partner of the smiling, indolent Chavis. If his face lacked a little something in character or steadiness, she supplied the deficiency. For that matter, the capable line of her shoulders told a plain enough story. She had often done a man's work as well as a woman's around the ranch on Murderer's Creek.

"You run along now," said Chavis, staring through the window. "I'll see this instant about that pump."

She went silently back into the kitchen, and presently the man heard her calling the boy from the patch to fill the water bucket again. He tossed the end of his cigar in the fireplace, took another from his pocket, and walked to the porch. For a moment he appeared undecided whether to sit down or continue, but finally moved on across the clearing. Itchy had somehow blundered through his job on the bridge, and was standing over the rail, peering into the water like a fascinated child. The grotesque attitude struck Chavis, and he chuckled. "It's plumb time this meadow was cleaned of all the trash hangin'

round. You pile things up an' move that hay rake to the shed. Move, now!"

He walked on, viewing the place suddenly through the eyes of a stranger. "Don't know as cleanin' up will do any good. Whatever possessed me to move into this here country, anyhow? Sure been a waste of time. I reckon——"

The sound of hoofs came up the road again, far more urgent than the preceding ones. Chavis turned, his cigar suspended, the very picture of serenity. But, when a rider came dashing across the bridge, astride a roan pony that showed lather under the saddle skirts, Chavis lost some of his serenity and moved quickly forward to meet the newcomer. "You seem in a hurry, Sesteris," said he.

The man was a burly, barrel-chested creature, so large of frame that he made the pony seem small. Perspiration trickled beneath his hat band and glistened on a square, unimaginative face. A flat nose gave him the air of perpetually sneering and he looked down at Chavis with pale blue eyes that were filled with hard speculation. "Trouble's broke loose, Chavis," he said, looking around at the distant Itchy. "Some fool left evidence layin' around, an' they got most of the gang dead to rights. Get on your hoss, and don't stop until you're plumb clear of this State! Don't stand there lookin' at me, like that! Move pronto, you fool! There's a committee on my trail!"

Chavis was rubbing the cigar rapidly between his thumbs. The color ebbed from his face and, for a moment, he looked like a cornered animal. His eyes flashed and his lips drew back. But his long pose of carelessness came back to him, and presently he was smiling a thin, crooked smile. "Well, I've been waiting for this. When a man works with scoundrels, some one of them will betray him, soon or late. Which one was it?" he asked.

Sesteris growled, "Oh, Lefty, left the gate open, but it was Sim who squealed. Your name got out before he had sense enough to shut up. I was out of it, but one of the boys got word to me. So far's I know, I'm still under cover, unless Sim squeals some more. But I'm makin' tracks until I find out for sure. And there's a committee right behind me, huntin' fer you. Now get your pony!"

"In a minute," said Chavis. He raised his voice to Wes. "Oh, Wes, saddle Sunfish, will you? I'm goin' over town." Then, walking quickly to the house, he sat down at his desk and began writing. Once or twice he seemed at loss for words and, at the end of every sentence, he looked toward the kitchen door. But his wife was hard at work. Finally, he finished the note, slipped it into an envelope and, with many flourishes of the pen, addressed it to "Mrs. Helen Chillingdon Chavis." He tarried a moment longer to paw over the papers strewn on the desk but, unable to find what he wanted, gave a shrug of resignation and went outside again, holding the letter in his hand. Wes had the pony ready, and Chavis sprang to the saddle. "Wes, my lad," said he, "you have always been a capable hand. I commit the difficulties of the place to you." And with that enigmatic sentence he turned away.

He whipped the pony to a dead run and, leading Sesteris by a length, clattered across the bridge. Just as he entered the trees, he turned and waved at Wes and dropped the letter to the ground. Sesteris yelled, "Spur that pony, Ben! If you can make Prairie City by ten o'clock, you'll ketch the Limited! Good-by! I'm turnin' off fer shelter!"

He checked his horse and swung into the trees. There was a trail going across the foothills and this he took. Chavis raced on alone, reached the flat country, and soon was lost in windings of the hot desert road.

Wes, the top hand, went across the bridge and picked up the letter, grumbling softly, "Wonder that lazy man wouldn't do a little work aroun' this rancho. 'Helen Chillingdon Chavis.' Well, I dunno what her name was before she married him, but ten to one it was a sight better than his. One leetle finger of that woman's hand is worth his whole arm. It sure do make me hoppin' mad to see her doin' all the work an' him smirkin' over his fat cigars. The lazy hop-toad!"

Wes was a short, broad-shouldered man with all the earmarks of an efficient ranch hand. Once upon a time he would have scorned all the odds and ends of labor that usually fall to the green hands. But the cow country was changing and Wes with it. Moreover, he was a character capable of intense loyalty, and it was not long before he had conceived it his duty to stick by the ranch on Murderer's Creek in order to do what he could toward lightening the labor of Mrs. Chavis. Wes would have killed outright the man who so much as gave her an unkind look. And, as he walked toward the house, his face was wreathed in scowls. 'And' what's his business with Al Sesteris, anyhow? It sure won't help his reputation to be seen with that crooked sheep-eater. Looks funny to me," he muttered to himself.

Mrs. Chavis came through the door, brushing the hair from her eyes. "Wes, did you see Mr. Chavis ride away?" she asked.

"Yes'm," said Wes, flushing. "Here's a letter he meant fer you to have, I guess."

She took it, looked strangely at the flourish of handwriting on the envelope, and ripped it open with one nervous gesture. Wes, standing obediently at hand, saw her eyes race across the page and flare with sudden emotion. The color faded from her cheeks and he put out his hand, thinking that she was about to fall. "Why, ma'am, there ain't anything wrong, is there?" he asked.

She looked at him as if he were an utter stranger, then back to the writing. "Wes, you had better go hitch up the buckboard," she said. It was so faint that he had to lean forward to catch the words. "Use the grays—they'll go faster."

"Yes'm," said Wes, going off on the run.

Mrs. Chavis went back to the kitchen and sat down, smoothing out the missive and studying the bold writing for a second time. It was not a long letter and it came directly to the point:

Helen, I've got to skip. When you dance, you've got to pay the fiddler. Anyhow, it's been in my mind some time to clear out and let you run the ranch. Six years in one place is plenty long enough for a Chavis. Run into town and see the lawyer. I fixed things with him a week ago, figuring that something like this would break. You'll do better than I did. Never saw a woman who had a head like you've got. I don't guess there'll be any tears shed, because we ain't been pulling in the same direction for a long time. The kids are yours, the ranch is yours, and anything else that you can find out in the sand and sagebrush, which won't be much. Good-by!

P.S. Don't bother about getting me back. I'll make the ten o'clock Limited. And even if I could, I wouldn't come back.

She looked at the clock. It was nine-thirty. Just twenty minutes before, the man had been smiling at her down the length of his cigar, masking his feelings and his intentions behind his curiously inscrutable eyes. And at the thought of those eyes, it came over Helen Chavis like the sweep of a devastating tide that she had never really known the man to whom she had been married for nine years. She got up, tore the letter into bits, and threw it in the stove.

"Well, Ben," she murmured, "we might have weathered through, if you had only been a little less lazy."

There was a clatter of hoofs on the bridge, and she looked out to see a body of horsemen coming toward the house.

Wes had deserted the barn and was streaking toward them on foot. Glancing anxiously at the clock, she walked to the porch, composing her face in a more cheerful aspect.

"Why, Mr. Marshall, it's been a considerable time since you were here," she said.

They were a very silent crew and, at first glance, the woman saw that something unusual had banded them together. Neither were they an ordinary cavalcade of cowhands. Every man in the group was owner or renter of a ranch, and every man had a responsible position in the community. They were young and they were old, ranging from the dean of all, "Dad" Meders, to Lon Marshall, who, in his early thirties, had built up a ranch and a name to conjure with throughout the county. And, as in many other assemblies, he seemed here to be the chosen spokesman for them all. Helen Chavis looked at his lanky frame and strong fighting face with a sinking heart, for he was a character known to carry through what once he had started. Yet when he doffed his hat and spoke it was in a husky, almost apologetic manner.

"Ma'am, it's mighty pleasant to see you. Worth the long and dusty ride that we've had, that's a fact. But you'll see that we're on business, and we'd like to have your husband among us. It's a sort of committee, if you please, to pass on certain events, and we'd like him along to cast his vote."

Wes stood apart, eying the group. Helen Chavis, shooting a swift glance at him, saw a look printed on his face which said more clearly than words that he had not believed a word of Marshall's explanation. She inclined her head.

"Let me think. He mentioned something about going to town this morning. What time is it, Mr. Marshall?"

Every man of the group dived for his watch pocket. Marshall grinned, and let his arm drop. "Reckon I'll have to move faster," he said. "Let's see, now. I guess that Dad's time ought to be official. What do you say, Dad?"

"This turnip says twenty minutes to ten," the old man replied.

Helen Chavis nodded. "He has been gone a half hour or better, Mr. Marshall. I imagine that he's very nearly to Prairie City now."

The group shifted a little and looked all the more sober. Marshall bowed. "I reckon we'll find him there, then," he stated.

"You may," said the woman. "Now won't you men come in and have coffee before you ride on? The pot's on the stove and I'd be mighty pleased."

"Why, ma'am," said Marshall, seemingly genuinely regretful, "I'd kill a man to get here, under any other circumstances. But we've got scarcely a minute to lose. We're plumb sorry to bother you so. Good-by."

She smiled faintly at them, and the next moment they wheeled and cantered to the bridge. As long as they were in sight of the house they kept the same pace. When the last rider had passed beyond the pines, she heard a voice speak one urgent word. And then the drumming beats of their horses' hoofs echoed strongly across the creek and was audible for several moments, dying out at last as they entered open country. Wes fiddled with his hat, not daring to raise his eyes. Helen Chavis spoke gently. "Better hitch the team now, Wes. I'll be going in as soon as I can."

Within ten minutes she, too, was traveling toward Prairie City, carrying in her purse all the papers of importance that she was able to find in the disheveled desk. As she drove along, her mind was filled with a hundred things and, at certain stages, she shook her head, unable to clear the confusion. "He'll make the Limited. And I've not a doubt in the world that those men

were after him. Oh, they didn't fool me, though they were gentlemen enough to try! It's probably cattle. What else could there be in this country? And that's probably the reason he took those trips into the hills. No wonder he cared so little for the ranch."

The road wound over rolling hills of sand and skirted innumerable small buttes. Once she stopped in the very heart of the desert beside a watering trough and pumped water for her team. It was a trip that she had always dreaded because of the intolerable heat and desolation. On this occasion, though, she scarcely noted the country, so occupied was she with all the various angles of the morning's trouble. And, when finally the grays trotted into Prairie City, she was for a little while unable to believe that she hadn't punished the horses by driving them too fast.

Her first visit was to the lawyer, Dan Rounds, and there she had another view of Ben Chavis' mind, revealed by the slightly embarrassed legal man.

"It is entirely none of my business," said he, "but I've just heard that he got on the Limited. Going off for a little trip?"

"Why should I try to conceal something that will sooner or later be known?" she countered. "Ben Chavis has left me and intends never to come back. That's what I've come up here for."

The lawyer had the air of wishing to cut off his tongue. "Oh, I beg your pardon, Mrs. Chavis. I never intended——" he began.

But she stopped him. "Never mind. I learned early to see straight and speak straight. Ben left me a note and he mentioned that I should come to you," she said.

"This unfortunate occurrence explains, then, his action of last week," said Rounds, filling his voice as if speaking to a jury. "He came in here in a strange frame of mind—I'll not say that he was drunk, Mrs. Chavis. He just had a few drinks and was smiling in that way of his. And nothing should do but that I must make out papers transferring all rights in the ranch to you, so far as he held them. I did that, under oath of secrecy. I can give you the papers now if you want to see——" he added.

"Never mind. You are my lawyer. Keep them. I'm learning fast, and I dare say that I haven't found much yet. You'll do me a favor by telling whoever you meet that there's a new manager at the Murderer's Creek ranch. I want the county to know it," Mrs. Chavis said.

She left an astonished man behind her and crossed the street to the bank. All during the interview with Rounds she had seemed to be revolving something in her mind. A small wry smile began to form on her mouth and, when she sat down before Elnathan Driggs, president of Prairie City's only bank, it had grown larger and lost its wryness. "News travels fast in this town," she began by way of preliminaries. "I suppose you already know that Ben took the Limited."

"Well," said the banker cautiously, "I can see the depot from my window. Going on a visit, was he?"

"A permanent one, Mr. Driggs. The ranch is on my shoulders now. That's why I'm here. Seems like I never could get the hang of what Ben owed you on the place. Just when does the next note fall due?" she asked.

"The first of November, Mrs. Chavis. But, of course, you know that the last one's still unpaid?" the banker questioned her.

She sat up, a startled look on her face. "Why, Mr. Driggs, didn't Ben take that up when it fell due? Goodness knows how we pinched and saved to get the money."

The banker pursed his lips and

looked over his glasses. He spoke gently. "I reckon that there's some things you don't know about your husband, ma'am. The note wasn't paid." He turned away, fumbling at a file behind him in order that he might not have to look at her eyes just then. But when she broke the silence it was with a firm voice and he swung around, blessing her for the courage she had.

"I guess that I'm learning, Mr. Driggs. Well, if you'll have patience with me, I'll pay. There's a hundred head of stock to market this month," she said.

He shook his head. "No. There *was* a hundred. But Mr. Chavis got rid of them. I misdoubt you've got fifty critters on the range now," he informed her.

"But, I can't imagine—— He didn't ship them. I'd have known that, at least!"

Driggs toyed with his pen. "Didn't know that he was a man fond of poker, did you? Well, that's where his beeves went," he said. "Lost at cards. I guess that I've heard the whole yarn from him or indirect. I'd have closed on the defaulted note, but he made a strong promise, at the time, to take both up when the next fell due. It isn't strictly business, but it wouldn't do for us, situated like we are, to take over the ranch. I guess that every bank's got its share of abandoned ranches an' frozen credits. Land don't do a bank any good unless it's saleable, and Heaven knows no one is buying now. We've got to wait and hope that things will clear up."

She was silent for several minutes. "Goodness knows," she said at last, "I've plenty in my mind to think over. Ben couldn't make the place do much, but somehow I think that I can. It's just in my bones, that ranch; and I've got ideas a man wouldn't consider as being dignified. But I believe in them."

The banker permitted himself a smile. "You go ahead, Mrs. Chavis," he said. "I think that you're a pretty good business woman. Give a fellow like me credit for watching folks, won't you? It's my business to know about how much a man can or can't do. You go ahead, and we'll saw wood for the time bein'. Far as that goes, this is the most interesting news that I've heard from the ranch on Murderer's Creek in some time."

The woman went out with the selfsame smile on her face, and walked directly to a store, reappearing in a little while with several bundles. The adjoining place was a barber shop and, after a moment of hesitation, in which the color came strongly to her cheeks, she walked in and took a chair.

"Cut my hair," she ordered. "Cut it like a man's."

She watched the barber shear it off, ran her hand over her head when the task was finished, and left the shop with her lips pressed together. It was not so very often that a woman bobbed her hair in Prairie City, and for a married woman to do so amounted to news.

Her next stop was at the newspaper office where she left the following notice:

This is to give notice that Ben Chillingdon Chavis to-day left the Box M Ranch and his wife. All business concerning the ranch will be assumed by me. HELEN CHAVIS.

"That wasn't easy," she murmured, leaving the office, "but folks might as well know the truth first-hand as to go around whispering about it. I'm not ashamed, and I'll show 'em what a woman can do!"

There were a few more visits—one to the stage office, from which she emerged triumphantly and another to an old ramshackle house on the edge of town. After that she went directly to her wagon. She got to the seat, unwound the reins from the brake, and was about to start when she heard some one speaking at her side.

"Why, good mornin', Mrs. Chavis. It ain't often you visit town."

She turned to see the man whom, of all men in the county, she detested most strongly—Booth Talant.

CHAPTER II.

THE RANCH UNDERGOES A CHANGE.

MRS. CHAVIS gripped the reins and threw back her shoulders as if expecting trouble. This was a state of body and mind that the appearance of Booth Talant always invoked, despite the fact that he had never, in six year's acquaintance, offered her so much as an unkind word. There was a peculiar animal force in the man that warned her to be on guard, and left her nervous and troubled for hours after. It had always been like this and, and in an honest effort to discover the reason for such a feeling, she began to compare Talant with Lon Marshall.

In some ways they were the same type—both tall, raw-boned products of the cattle country, both successful ranchers and bold movers. But Marshall attracted people to him, never repelled them; and Mrs. Chavis, surveying Talant, decided that the difference must be in their faces. There was an honesty about Marshall, a bluntness of word and temper that never left men in doubt as to his position. When he got angry—and in the heat of that country men often lost their tempers—he flared forth in one blast, and then quickly forgot it, much to the admiration of his neighbors.

Yet Mrs. Chavis had never witnessed or heard of Talant's losing control of himself so far as to use invective or condemn other men. More than once, when the ranchers were gathered at her house, she had seen his eyes glow when some blunt joke was passed at his expense, and had held her breath, expecting trouble. Then it was that a kind of red color invaded those eyes, and pallor crept around his nose while he stared at the floor, utterly silent. By and by he would speak again soberly, in a voice almost lifeless. And Mrs. Chavis had gone away marveling at the hidden emotions that must have boiled up and been repressed.

"Why, Mrs. Chavis, you're starin' at me like you'd seen a ghost," Talant said.

She started. "Oh! Well, I've been trying to think if I forgot anything in town. It would be a long trip to come back just for a package of hairpins, wouldn't it?" she asked.

He nodded, seeming to turn the phrase over in his mind. "Reckon you won't be needin' hairpins for a while, though. How's tricks on the Box M?"

"The Box M," she assured him, "is going to change a little. I'm the manager now, Mr. Talant."

"Yeah?" said he, cocking his head aside. "That's right interestin'." She saw that he was on the verge of adding something but, following his habitual cautiousness of expression, forebore. Presently, after another of his silences, he looked at the sky and added, "if there's anything that I can help you at, Mrs. Chavis, don't hesitate to call on me."

It was a convenient place to wind up the interview, and Mrs. Chavis clucked her tongue at the horses. "Get up, Bell, Dick. Thanks, Mr. Talant, I'll remember that. I don't pretend to know much about running a ranch and may need some help." She rode away, glancing back after she had gone twenty yards. He still stood planted in the highway, staring at her. "Get up, Bell! My land, I feel as if I'd caught the ague! Such a man!" she said to herself. The sun fell in her eyes with blinding force and the heat burned her cheeks. Enveloped in a high cloud of dust, she wheeled back toward the ranch.

Talant, meanwhile, was meditating. "I wonder jest how much she knows of her husband's doin's? Nobody could

have told her unless it was Chavis himself, which ain't likely. Still, she's bound to wonder what he run off for an' suspect somethin'. Oh, well!" he concluded.

Some one hailed him. Turning, he found Lon Marshall crossing the street. "Come over to the hotel, Talant. We boys are debatin' measures and want you in the parley. That Mrs. Chavis going back home. I'm glad that I was under cover when she came in. Makes me feel like a skunk. How such a fine woman can have such a measly husband is sure beyond me."

"Men are deceivin' critters," agreed Talant amicably, joining Marshall. They crossed to the hotel and ducked through a door. Marshall shut it, shot the bolt, and confronted the dusty, sober men whom he had led in the fruitless chase across country.

"Well, here's Talant," he announced. "Now let's get down to brass tacks."

The tone caused Talant to fling up his head. He looked at Marshall with wary eyes, then around the group. His fingers interlocked behind his back. Something seemed to reassure him, for he dropped his head and stared at the pattern of the dingy rug on the floor.

"What I want to say, and say right off the bat," began Marshall energetically, "is that none of us, by word or sign, should let on to Mrs. Chavis that we want her husband for cattle rustlin'. I guess that's pretty well understood. For my part, I'm passin' it around town that if any such gent takes the notion into his head to break the news to her, I'll have a hot session with him. Of course, maybe he told her himself before he pulled freight. But maybe he didn't. And maybe she suspects it, anyway. But if she doesn't, it's up to us not to tell her. If she does, that's her business and not ours. Anyway you work it, silence is plumb the best policy. She's got troubles enough."

"Yep, that's right," said Dad Meders.

"Now," continued Marshall, "what's the general opinion on Chavis? Do we try to head him off by telegraph or do we let him get away?"

Dad Meders, too, had an opinion on that, and rose to give it. "We got the best part of the bunch. Not all, but most of 'em. The thing's busted up, I'm thinkin'. Now, it don't seem to me Chavis was much more'n a dummy in the rustlers' scheme. They used his range to run the tampered stuff an' give him a cut. He ain't very important, because he never was very active. And, anyhow, by the time we get a telegram through to the next sheriff, he'll be out of the State. What's the use fussin'? Let him go."

It seemed to be the general opinion, and Marshall accepted it eagerly. "All right, boys, then we'll just forget him. Reckon that that's all there is to argue about, isn't it? Only other thing I wanted to say was that, if any of you folks figure to have any claims against the Chavis ranch risin' from this rustlin', I'd take it handsomely if you'd keep it quiet and let me settle instead of pressin' Mrs. Chavis. It bothers me to see a woman given a raw deal, and she'll be havin' a hard row of potatoes to hoe for some time."

Dad Meders giggled like a schoolboy until he strangled. The meeting turned into an uproar, and Lon Marshall flushed at the good-natured raillery that he received. "Well, you pirates," said he. "But I don't believe in runnin' folks to earth unnecessarily. So make the most of it."

Booth Talant suddenly spoke up, "Lon, I've got a horse back of the stable that I'd lay fifty dollars you ain't able to ride."

The laughter subsided and in the silence that followed—the silence of men witnessing an absorbing scene—Marshall and Talant became the center for all eyes. Talant and his passion for wild and vicious horses formed a topic

for many tongues in that country. The man seemed to take an unusual pleasure in capturing and breaking them. He didn't ride the animals himself, and he was not slow to admit his incapacity in that direction. There were men on his ranch who did nothing else but trap strays from the wild bunch and then, in the corral with Talant sitting on the top fence, ride out the storm. And more than once, when Talant had acquired a particularly mean animal, he had challenged Marshall to sit in the saddle. Marshall, a lover of anything pertaining to the range and the corral, seldom refused. There were ranchers who thought that they saw significance in this constant challenge and acceptance. At least, there was enough of the dramatic in the situation to cause men, in their minds, to pit the two against each other and to develop that kind of a public attitude which, sooner or later, drives the principals willingly or unwillingly into a fight of bitter and tragic consequences.

Lon Marshall shook his head, drawling, "Well it must be a good cayuse, if you're wagerin' fifty dollars. Let's go see the feller."

The two marched out of the hotel and down the street to the corral with the members of the posse trailing eagerly behind. Two sad-looking cowhands, perched on the top rail of the corral, moved at Talant's brief order: "Snub that horse and throw a saddle on." The ranchers climbed to better points of view and looked down on Talant's new acquisition.

He was a deceptive appearing horse, with a mild eye and an innocent manner; but Dad Meders made one brief survey and said succinctly, "a hard one an' no mistake. Lon, your fifty dollars is plumb in danger."

The two sad hands started methodically to work, and the wild horse went down in a billow of dust, to come up in a moment blindfolded; in a trice, he was saddled and bridled. "Come an' take your punishment," said one. Marshall crossed the corral. "Open that gate and open her wide," he ordered. And next moment he was in the saddle. The two hands rode away and the action began.

The horse stood for the fraction of a moment, head up, quivering at the withers. Then he whirled and dashed through the gate—a silver-gray flash in the hot western sun, dust rolling behind. It did not go far before it stopped, head lowered and front feet plunging deep in the ground. Its back rose high, and the crowd had a glimpse of Marshall sliding sidewise from the beast down into the dust. Talant leaned forward on his perch, dead white around the nose, his eyes gleaming. The horse went streaming across the desert, head flung up, riderless. The two hands raced after him, and presently Lon Marshall rose out of the thick cloud, waving a hand. Talant relaxed, lips pressed tightly together. "Saddle cinch busted. That's funny," he said.

"Yeah, ain't it?" said Dad Meders.

Lon Marshall limped back to the corral. "Wild horse for certain. Well, we'll take another shot at the feller," he remarked.

The hands brought the horse back, and again went through the ceremony of saddling. Lon Marshall swung up with a grin. "See if we can't stay on deck a while this time," said he and, thereupon, was too busy for any further speech. The wild horse settled down to a volcanic exhibition of protest, hopping a complete circle, and rearing high. Dad Meders let out a shrill whoop and yelled at Talant, "Another fifty he sticks, Booth! Ride 'im, cowboy!"

Marshall rode, head snapping back, swaying like a drunken man. The animal flung itself from the earth at an angle and appeared, through the dust, like a fish in the arc of its leap. The man seemed high and forlorn on the edge

of nothing at all. Then he sank, swooping forward over the pommel. His hat flew through the air and dropped at Dad Meders' feet, seeming to mark another stage of the fight. The horse walked on its hind legs, nostrils flaring, and descended with a twist of its body; still Marshall held his seat.

"Off for another ride!" yelled Meders. "Talant, you've sure lost your fifty!"

The animal shot across the desert at the top of its speed, going in the straightest of lines. Talant got down from the top rail with a shake of his head, "Guess I was fooled," he remarked. "Shucks, that wasn't much of a fight."

"Well if you figgered on an accident, you sure were mistaken," said Meders. "But it were a pretty ride while it lasted."

"Uh-huh," muttered Talant, watching the horse and rider recede in the distance. The rest of the group sauntered off and left him alone. "And I thought," he muttered, "that that horse was mean. Confound you, Lon Marshall, I'll find a cayuse to bust your neck yet!"

He waited for a half hour, while the horse made a sweeping circle in the desert and came slowly back, a thing of utter dejection, head hanging low, and dripping in lather. Marshall slid off. "Well, that was a dog-goned hot ride in the desert. Fifty dollars well earned if you should ask me. But as for buckin', he won't win any prizes. Let's go get us a drink of somethin' cold. It's high time I was ridin' for home."

"If you're goin' back pronto, I'll ride with you," said Talant.

"We're off," replied Marshall.

When Mrs. Chavis arrived home sometime after noon, she found that her little girl had, with the assistance of Wes, gotten up a meal, and had kept some of it warm for her. After eating, she drew her children to her and talked long and earnestly to them, sending them out to play afterward, with sober faces. Then she went to her room, unwrapped the packages she had got in town and, in a little while, appeared on the porch. Wes was going by at the time and, when he saw her, he stopped dead, blushing until his whole face was a deep crimson. "Why —why, Mrs. Chavis," he stammered.

She had changed her whole appearance, from head to foot. In place of a skirt, she wore a pair of whipcord riding-breeches and leather boots. A loose wool jacket draped her shoulders and a hat—the very same kind of a hat that Lon Marshall wore—was on her closely-cropped head. But Helen Chavis was young, and as slim and straight as any soldier, with well-set shoulders. And the mannish clothes, far from diminishing the grace of her carriage, set off the sober intelligence of her face and brought out the zest of living in her gray eyes.

"Don't be so embarrassed, Wes," she said, smiling a little. "It's not immodest for a woman to dress sensibly. I've got to run this place from now on, and I can't be bothered brushing my hair or watching my dresses. You'll get accustomed to it."

"Yes, ma'm," answered Wes meekly. "Did you say that you was goin' to run the place?"

"Just so. Mr. Chavis went East, for good. Now, Wes, we've got a lot to do, and we can't go fooling around like we have been. You're the only man on this ranch worth your salt and, from now on, I'm raising you to ninety dollars a month. That is, if you'd care to stay on and work under a woman," she concluded.

"Ma'am, excuse me, but I'll stick here until the place freezes plumb up to the gates," Wes said.

"Fine! Now, first off, it's time that

this meadow was cleaned of all the rubbish. I want you to drag that hay rake and the spike harrow back to the shed. When you get some time, you'd better grease them. Then hitch the wagon, and throw all these piles of brush aboard and dump them down by the point. We're going to have a bonfire of junk. Then you had better replace the planking on the bridge, and put a new gasket in the pump. You'll earn your ninety dollars, Wes."

He had begun to grin, when she mentioned clearing the meadow and, before she was through talking, he slapped his palm against his thigh. "Ma'am, them things have been in my mind fer quite a spell. Happy days!" he ejaculated. And he started toward the barn with his sombrero pushed away from his pleased face.

Mrs. Chavis looked around and, after some searching, found Itchy half asleep behind a pile of boards. "Itchy," said she, "you never have earned your meals on this ranch. Mr. Chavis paid you thirty dollars just to laugh at you, but I can't afford it. You can leave or you can stay, but if you stay you'll get nothing but your board and you'll have to do chores. I won't be plagued with watching you all the time. Now what's the answer?"

Itchy looked aggrieved. His simple face simulated thought. But the effort was too great, and he ended by scratching his whiskers and saying profoundly, "Why, Mrs. Chavis, I done a lot of work aroun' here what I ain't never got no credit fer. But I'll stay."

"Very well. Now you go across the bridge and slash away the brush that's growing into our road. We'll be hemmed in by jungles pretty soon. And if I catch you sleeping, you'll pack your blankets and ride off. Hustle now. There are to be no drones on the Box M," was the ultimatum.

Itchy shambled toward the barns for tools, shaking his misshapen head at every step. Mrs. Chavis watched him with doubt. "Tisn't a blessed thing more than charity to keep him," she said, "but I'll give him a trial. Now for that sign."

There was a board on the lumber pile that caught her eye and she took it to the porch, then went around to the woodshed for a can of red paint and a brush. Sweeping the board clean, she traced out a design and set carefully to filling it with red letters. It took her almost an hour to do the job, and even then it was not entirely to her satisfaction. But it was the best that she could do, and it certainly would answer her purpose. Standing it against the wall, she stepped back to read:

MEALS AND BOARD AT THE BOX M RANCH

Family Style Dinner 50 Cents.

THE HEART OF THE GAME COUNTRY

Hunters Stop Here.

"That sign," she murmured, "is going to shock some of these old-time cattlemen. But beggars can't be choosers. I'm going to pay for this place, and I'll do it partly in a woman's way."

She left the sign to dry and, getting a rake from the shed, began to clear the yard of the six year's accumulation of sticks and stones and general débris that the indolent Chavis had scorned to touch. And as she drew the rubble into piles, Wes came along with a wagon and scooped them up. Place is beginnin' to look better already, ma'am," he remarked.

"This is just a starter, Wes. Cleaning a ranch doesn't appear to have anything to do with making money, but it draws the eye and that's what I want," was the answer. "Next week we're going to give the house a new coat of paint, and gravel the walk down to the creek. The barn needs a lot of attention, too, Wes. If I don't miss my guess we're going to have it full before long. And we'll have to give the storeroom a new

roof, because I'm going to stock it with provisions."

"Sounds as if you meant to do a general trade, ma'am. Who to?" Wes inquired.

"Among other things, Wes, we're going to advertise for hunters. Here's a mighty fine place to hunt and fish from," Mrs. Chavis explained.

"That's right, ma'am. Mighty fine trout in the creek and plenty of elk up in the ridges," the man said encouragingly.

The bridge rattled, and Mrs. Chavis looked up to see Lon Marshall and Booth Talant coming up. Talant's face was slightly ironical; Marshall was grinning through manifest embarrassment. "Ma'am," said he, doffing his hat, "what did you put Itchy to doin' out by the road?"

"Slashing, Mr. Marshall," said the woman. She became aware of his scrutiny, and her cheeks began to glow.

"Well, if I was you I'd get rid of him, because he's afflicted with sleepin' sickness and, at present, is blocking the highway, dead to the world. Why, ma'am, this place looks different, even in a few hours," Marshall continued.

"I'm trying to prove, Mr. Marshall, that a woman can run a ranch and make it pay. Do you see that sign on the porch? Well, that's just one of the ways in which I hope to do it. I saw the stage people in Prairie City, and they've agreed to stop here for dinner when they come down the mountain," Helen Chavis explained.

Talant had a dubious look, but Marshall nodded gravely. "Let me see, now. I'd reckon that there'd be four passengers every day, on the average. That's two dollars. Helps a lot, ma'am. Takes a business woman to think of such things. Us men are plain dumb in some ways. Anyhow, this country has cattle on the brain and can't see anything else. But you can't do all that cookin', can you?" Marshall asked.

"I've hired Mrs. Linkamon to cook for me. Her husband's a cripple now, you know, so she needs a place."

Just then, Wes drove the wagon across the bridge with a load of rubbish. Talant inquired smoothly, "Goin' to do away with cattle, then, Mrs. Chavis?"

"No, but they take time, and I've got to find means to make the ranch pay sooner. Then there's that piece of bottom soil between the creek and the road that's just been crying for something to raise. I'm writing to-day for some peach seedlings. It pays to have more than one anchor out for a storm. Most ranchers are hard hit when beef prices go down because they haven't anything to fall back on. Now look at Mr. Welch, over by Six Mile. He's got peaches and he's doing well, even though the cattlemen ridicule him."

Marshall nodded, his eyes fastened to the woman's face. But Talant shook his head doubtfully. "Hope you're right, Mrs. Chavis," said he, in a tone which indicated that he thought that she was using the poorest of judgment. "Better stick to cows."

"I guess you probably know," she returned dryly, "how many cows I've got left on the range. I hear that there's no more than fifty head, and maybe not half that. Do you see a fortune there, Mr. Talant?"

"Oh, I ain't meanin' to offer suggestions, Mrs. Chavis," rejoined Talant quickly.

Marshall thrust a stern look at him and spoke, "Of course she's right, Talant. Ain't a more hide-bound critter in the world than a cattleman who's set in his ways. No reason why peaches shouldn't be a profitable investment when they bear." He turned to the woman, grave and earnest. "Now, I'm your nearest neighbor, and if there's anything that I can do, I'd take it handsomely to be called on," he added.

"Thanks, Mr. Marshall, I will. Now,

won't you stay for supper?" Then, aware that she had left Talant from the invitation, she added, "and you, too?"

Talant shook his head. "Got to get home," he said.

Marshall was genuinely regretful. "There's a man waitin' at the ranch for me, this minute, Mrs. Chavis. But I'd sure like to keep that invitation for any other time," he added.

"Very well. There's a place for you any day," she said, smiling. "And the sign won't apply to you."

The men raised their hats and turned away. Crossing the bridge, they turned into the road and soon lost sight of the house. Within a few yards of the main highway, they pulled out to let Wes come by with his wagon; and, when the hired man came abreast of Marshall, the latter stopped and spoke:

"Say, Wes, you were here all mornin', weren't you?"

"Yeah," replied Wes, reining in. "Why?"

"Then maybe you could elucidate on one important point. Who was the gent who came along right before the committee and scared Ben Chavis off the roost?"

Wes pushed back his hat and squinted through the pine tops to where a late afternoon sun glinted through. He looked at Marshall's grave face and then at Talant. The latter stared back at him, with features suddenly sharpened and eyes that seemed to fill instantly with blood. Wes shook his head slowly. "Why, come to think, I was behind the barn when the gent busted across the bridge. I hear his hoss champin' but I don't get no sight of his face. None whatsoever," Wes announced.

"No sight at all?" persisted Marshall, searching the man's face. "Didn't hear anything or see anything that would give you an idea?"

"Nary," answered Wes. Talant's eyes lost a little of their color, and his lids drooped. "Too bad," he broke in laconically. "Let's go along, Lon."

The wagon rolled by, and the two horsemen, gaining the main road, swung upward, traveling silently. Marshall was lost in profound thought and, from time to time, Talant shot a glance toward him from beneath secretive lids. The highway curved, skirted a boulder, and shot mountainward at a greater angle, passing a trail that came down from the recesses of the pines. Of a sudden, Marshall slapped his hand on the saddle and looked sheepishly at Talant. "Shucks, I'm gettin' absent-minded, Booth. Forgot to ask Mrs. Chavis the very thing that I went to ask her. You wait here while I trot back." He brought the horse about and moved away.

"Come to think," called Talant, "I believe that I'll cut into this trail and go by Popo Creek. See you later."

"Good-by," said Marshall. The horse carried him down the hill and back to the side road to the ranch. Here, instead of going on in the clearing, he brought up, half hidden by the pines and waited patiently. Perhaps twenty minutes elapsed before Wes came through the lane of trees with another load of rubbish. Marshall drew abreast as Wes said, "Whoa, hosses, we got comp'ny again. What's up, now?"

"Don't figure that I'm tryin' to pump you unnecessarily," said Marshall. "But I thought that maybe you could remember something about that gent, if I came back alone. Some wise feller has said that two make company, but that three are plumb apt to impede the speech."

"Ain't it the truth," replied Wes, pushing back his sombrero. "You sure got uncommon wisdom, Mr. Marshall. What I wants to know is this: does Mrs. Chavis get involved? I ain't sayin' nothin' that'll hurt her."

"Wes, those sentiments are certainly admirable. Just you keep 'em, for that

little lady needs some square shooters. I'm on her side of the fence, make no mistake about it. But I'm afraid that there's others not so friendly," Marshall told him.

"There was a fella, and his name was Sesteris," uttered Wes, looking squarely at Marshall. "Should such be information plenty?"

"Thanks, Wes. I know who I can trust now, if anything should happen around the Box M. Where's Itchy gone?" Marshall asked.

Wes swore violently. "I threw him off the road to keep him from blockin' it. He's prob'ly asleep in the brush," he answered.

Marshall rode into the highway, and retraced his way back up the mountainside. Wes went on, dumped his rubbish, and came back. After he had passed, the brush rustled slightly and Talant stepped out, eyes flaming and deathly pale of face. Without a word he trotted in pursuit of Marshall. When he came to where the trail left the highway he followed it, led his horse from the thicket, and slowly climbed through the pines.

It was very nearly dark when Talant reached a particular ravine of the mountainside and urged his horse down a depression toward a cabin. A short way from it he stopped and whistled. After an interval, he repeated the signal, and then heard a gruff voice at his very elbow: "All right! But you should have sounded off before you come down the slope. I'd about made up my mind to plug you. Gettin' too black to see who's who."

Talant slid from the saddle and came face to face with the bulky Sesteris. In the shadows, the man looked sullen and formidable. "You might have shot," said Talant, "but you'd have missed me."

"Huh, what makes you think so?" Sesteris asked.

"The bullet ain't made that'll kill me. Too many have started my way an' missed."

"Yeah? Well, I'm sure glad that you figger so. But that ain't here ner there. What's happened since mornin'? Am I in or out of the ruckus?" Sesteris inquired.

Talant lit a cigarette and carried the burning match toward Sesteris' face. "You were safe until a couple of hours ago. Now you've got your foot in it, and all because of your own fool head. Sesteris, so help me, I sure could have killed you a while ago," Talant announced.

"Yeah? What's eatin' yuh?" the other demanded.

"When you comes foggin' into the Box M to warn Chavis, that squealin' Wes saw you. An' jest a short while ago Lon Marshall takes it into his head to do a little askin'. His first question was, who warned Chavis? Wes told him. Now what've you got to say? Seems to me that a man who's been in the game so long as you have, would naturally use his head. Fer that matter, I reckon that Itchy knows, too."

"Well," growled Sesteris, his bold eyes peering closely at Talant's face, "what was I supposed to do?"

"Your play," replied Talant coldly, "was to've stayed a thousan' miles clear of Ben Chavis. What business of yours was it, anyhow?"

"An' let him swing on a rope, huh? You know plumb well that that committee wasn't in no humorous frame of mind," Sesteris reminded him.

Talant swore. "What of it? He wasn't no relation of yours. Let him swing. You got other things to consider. Supposin' Lon Marshall should find out that you was workin' for me! I'd be in a fine mess. You got to consider those things, Sesteris. I'm plumb surprised at such chicken-hearted actions."

Sesteris moved closer. "Nobody ain't

ever called me an angel, Talant," he said. "I don't reckon that there's a meaner man in the State than me, unless it's you. But I've got some notions of bein' square. Ben Chavis always treated the rest of the boys square, an' he always treated me square. I had a chance to give him warnin', and I wasn't goin' to be no double-crossin' skunk."

"An' get yourself in a jack pot, to boot, eh?" Talant inquired.

"Oh, well, I figgered this mornin' that the committee was on my trail, likewise, so it didn't make no difference. Now, you look here, Talant. So long's I work fer you, I'll do it my own way. I guess that you ain't got no kick comin' so far. Things have gone plumb accordin' to schedule. I'll do your dirty job, but I ain't standin' for any nonsense. Get that straight," Sesteris demanded.

Talant was silent for a time, and Sesteris stepped back a pace, speaking querulously: "Do you hear? I'll play the game my own way and, and if you ain't satisfied, get somebody else. See if you can find any gent in the State who'll do what I been doin'."

The rancher retorted dryly, "Then how do you figger to be of any use with Wes knowin' your affairs? I got a lot of work fer you, but you'll have to take care of that gent—an' Itchy."

Sesteris lit a cigarette. The glow of the match revealed his face—a square, ugly block, bordered by a scowling forehead and set with two burning eyes. "Leave that to me," said he. "An' how about Lon Marshall?"

"I'll take care of him," replied Talant. "Now here's what you're to do right away. Get hold of all Mrs. Chavis' critters—there ain't more'n twenty or thirty—an' run 'em into the quicksands on Devil's Marsh. It's too risky to rustle 'em out of the country, so we'll have to kill 'em off. Watch your step, because the committee is keepin' close watch on the country. Get every animal that you can find. I don't want a Box M cow left."

The cigarette glowed in Sesteris' lips. "Not bein' satisfied with the profits of rustlin' you figger to bust a woman an' take over the land. What's that goin' to buy you?" he demanded.

"None of your business," said Talant sharply. "Do as you're told." He delved into a pocket and brought out a slip of paper. "I made a little diagram of the road that you should take with them cows. Stick to it, because the committee's got men layin' out, watchin'. Foller this diagram an' you'll be out o' their way."

"Uh-huh," said the ugly one, stuffing the paper in his coat. "I reckon that there'll be a price on my scalp, now that Lon Marshall knows."

"Leave that to me," replied Talant, riding off into the velvet shadows. "If you want me or I want you, remember the usual sign."

Sesteris cocked his head aside, listening for the scrape and rustle of Talant's horse. At last, he was left to the silence of the hillside and the small play of the night breeze in the pine tops. Moving back to the cabin, he muttered softly: "Better get my blankets an' sleep out to-night. Don't want to be boxed in. As fer Booth Talant, I can see that he'll skin me alive, if it ever should suit his purpose. That man's worse than a rattlesnake. I b'lieve that I better finish this job an' clear out of the country."

Booth Talant quartered down the slope, followed a worn trail that led to the bench land where his ranch headquarters were. As he traveled, his mind revolved around endless schemes, accepting some, rejecting others. But foremost was the problem of Sesteris. That burly individual had shown signs of rebellion lately that both irritated and alarmed the wily Talant. For Sesteris was the link between the rancher

and the band of rustlers, who had recently been caught by Lon Marshall's vigilance committee. He was the only man who knew of Talant's interest in the rustlers and the only man to know of Talant's various secret enterprises. And as such he was useful only so long as he was close-mouthed and subservient. Now that he had begun to display a captious temper, Talant began to consider means for his disposal. And, being utterly unscrupulous, he came directly and without hesitation to the ancient and irrevocable method. "When he gets that little chore finished, I reckon that I'd best put a bullet through his brain," he reflected. " 'Tain't good policy to let a man get so plumb dangerous as Al Sesteris. If it wasn't fer that cussed Lon Marshall, there wouldn't be any trouble!"

He reached his house an hour later, and immediately went to his desk and drew from it a letter. He had read it before, but the rereading of it seemed to give him great pleasure:

FRIEND TALANT: I got the news which you wanted, at last. It's all under cover yet, but I've got some friends around this Capitol. The Pudding River State Power Company has decided to come your way, all right. So if you've got any water power in prospect or any sizable creeks that could make water power, better tie them up now. Now that they've decided the question they'll be buying stuff very quietly. And if you've got what they want, they'll pay handsomely, depend on that. I guess it wouldn't hurt your conscience to stick 'em any, either, would it? Hoping that this is what you want, I'm yours until Niagara Falls. S. O.

Talant hid the letter away in a drawer, whistling softly. Then he rose and went to a map of the county tacked on the wall. It took no more than one glance to tell the reader the name of the one and only creek in the county that amounted to more than a trickle. It was Murderer's Creek and it ran, so far as its usable part was concerned, through the Box M ranch.

"When we get those cows mired and out of the way," mused Talant, "Mrs. Chavis won't have any ready means of makin' cash. That boardin' idea ain't goin' to amount to much, an' if it does we'll apply other methods. Yeah, I guess that we'll go to town to-morrow or the next day an' see Driggs."

CHAPTER III.

MURDER AT THE BOX M.

BEN CHAVIS had fled on Monday, leaving his wife confronted by a situation almost overwhelming. To almost any other woman in those same circumstances the burden would have been dispiriting. But Helen Chavis took up the struggle with tremendous courage, fortified by the fact that she had in the past, been the only one to take any great interest in the place. And she was convinced that, if men could make a living in this dry, hot country, she too, could prosper. So, by Thursday, the long idle machinery of the Box M began to turn and the place to lose some of its ramshackle air.

In that period neither she nor Wes had wasted time. The little island on which the ranch headquarters rested was cleaned from point to point, the fallow acres plowed, and every stick and limb that served no useful purpose burned or piled in the woodshed for fuel. On Tuesday a plump little woman dropped from the stage and took over the kitchen, cooking a supper that even the loyal Wes grudgingly admitted, to himself, was as good as any that Mrs. Chavis had ever produced. On Wednesday the stage brought several heavy cans from the hardware store, and very early Thursday morning the new manager of the Box M was trying her hand with paint and brush on the milk house.

The place hummed with industry. Even Itchy was at work, anchored directly beneath Mrs. Chavis' eyes, shovel-

ing gravel from the creek to ballast the driveway. That driveway was, in the woman's mind, the key arch of her plan. It crossed the plank bridge, swept in a circle, and came up to the porch—a porch that would, in the near future, invite travelers by reason of its white paint and cool recesses—and then swung back to the bridge again. Mrs. Chavis well knew that, if she could only strike the eye of the hot and dusty wayfarer, she could win the biggest part of her battle.

Down on the lower stretch of the road, she heard the creaking of the stage wheels in the ruts. Deserting her work, she stripped off the encumbering overalls and ran for the kitchen, warning the cook: "All right, Mrs. Linkamon, I guess that you can dish up." Washing her hands and smoothing her hair, she reached the front just as the stage clattered across the bridge and careened up to the house. There were three people in it, two wilted city men, and Elnathan Driggs, the banker. Helen Chavis looked at his wrinkled face with a sudden premonition of trouble, but turned to welcome the strangers into the house and show them the dining room. Driggs lingered on the porch, speaking in a subdued manner when she reappeared.

"Dinner can wait for a minute, Mrs. Chavis. Jest you take a turn with me down by the creek. Somethin' I'd like to say," he told her.

There could be only one thing, and they had not walked ten feet before she anticipated him. "It's about my notes, Mr. Driggs?" she asked.

"Why, ma'am, I'm forced to say that it is. I don't know whether you understand the position of the bank or not, but we're up against it, like most other western banks. Too many ranchers borrowed money, Mrs. Chavis, and then, when the slump in beef prices came along, they couldn't pay. It's forced us to take over a great deal of property, which can't be sold right now. So you see, we're hard up for cash. I guess that I must hold nigh to fifty thousand dollars' worth of notes which can't be collected for some years," he explained.

"Yes. But, how can I help you right now? If you will give me a month——" she began.

"I ain't pressin' you, Mrs. Chavis. It's a horse of another color. My situation is mighty serious—I'm bein' frank just to you—and so, when a chance came yesterday to sell your notes to another party, I was forced to do it," the banker explained.

"Sold them? Who to?"

Driggs appeared to have difficulty with his throat. He coughed and hesitated, finally blurting out the one word, "Talant."

"Booth Talant!" Mrs. Chavis stepped back—that same old antagonism rousing at the very name of the man. "What could he possibly be wanting with my notes? If I can't pay, I know that he'd foreclose in a minute." Then a more serious thought came to her. "And he can do that right this day, for there's one already overdue. Oh, Mr. Driggs, why didn't you tell me first?" she asked.

"No," he interrupted hastily. "That five-hundred-dollar note overdue I took up myself, Mrs. Chavis, out of my own pocketbook. It's a personal debt that you owe me now, not the bank. I ain't pressin' you for it. But the others I sold to him. As for notifyin' you, there wasn't time. The bank examiner came to town right after the transaction—I knew that he was coming—and it was an opportunity to make my books look a little better. Really, it ain't so bad. You've got resources enough to meet your obligations when they come due. Leastwise the next one or two."

"Three weeks from now another payment will fall due," said she, more to herself than to him. "Well, I guess that I had better send Wes out to bring in all the Box M cattle and turn them

off. Don't worry about it, Mr. Driggs. You can't be assuming other people's troubles."

"I take that kindly," said the banker, vastly relieved.

They walked back to the dining room, where the banker took a hasty meal and scuttled into the stage as it swung out of the clearing. Mrs. Chavis ate a little and returned to the milk house, smiling a little. "And I was so tangled up in my own affairs that I forgot to thank the poor man for helping me as much as he has," she mused.

Scarcely had she settled down to her job, when the rumbling of the plank bridge announced another visitor. She got down from her ladder and turned to find Booth Talant slipping from the saddle. "It ain't hardly the same woman," said he, surveying the overalls.

She nodded. "Oh, yes it is. By the way, I suppose that you've come to tell me something that I already know."

"Who told you?" he asked, losing his amiability. Those enigmatic eyes closed slightly.

"Mr. Driggs. If you are here to warn me about being prompt, you've wasted your time. When the first comes, Mr. Talant, you'll find me ready," Helen Chavis told him.

"I've got a proposition that I figger will interest you," said he, and leaned on the ladder. "I won't beat around the bush none. I bought up your notes, because I don't figger that you're able to make it and because I want the Box M to extend my range. Now, I'm not the kind of feller to watch you go under and grin about it. Here—I'll cancel what you owe and give you two thousand dollars in addition if you'll transfer the ranch to me. Ain't it fair?" he asked.

"It would be fair, if I really couldn't clear the ranch from debt. But I can," she said.

"Not interested, eh?" the man inquired.

She studied him, noting the pallor creep slowly down his cheeks and the tinge of red invade his eyes. He was not a man who was able to mask the tyranny of his emotions. If ever there were a dangerous man, Helen Chavis decided at that moment, Booth Talant was one. And she resolved to watch him as she had never felt it necessary to watch any human being. "No," she assured him, "I'm not interested."

"Time will come when you'll think different," said he, swinging up to the saddle. His eyes flashed and he galloped away. Reaching the main road he turned upward.

"I guess that I've bungled somewhere," he told himself, bitterly. "It's all on account of that fool, Sesteris! I can't wait three weeks. She won't be able to meet her debts then, with all them cattle gone. But I ain't able to wait that long. The power company is apt to come in here any day now and make a dicker with her. I'll smash that bold lady somehow, and I'll do it sudden!" he decided.

He felt, even as he talked, that the situation was slipping away from him. The clear, unafraid eyes of the woman served to remind him of the check that he had suffered. And like many another character of unstable temper, it made him more reckless, more desperate and inclined to force his way by harsher means. As a vent to his feelings, he dug his spurs deep into the horse's hide and dashed between the pines.

If he left the interview in an unsettled frame of mind, Helen Chavis was no less affected. No sooner had he gotten from sight than she dropped her brush, abandoned the overalls, and called across the meadow for Wes to come up with saddle horses. In a very few minutes, both of them were cantering down the main road and, after they had struck the fringe of the desert, going across country.

"I want to see what we've got left,"

said she. Every head of stock that can possibly be shipped must be gotten away. There's no time to lose, Wes." And though she did not say so aloud, she added that she could not possibly rest secure until the money for the ensuing payment was in her hands.

"I ain't sayin' how many you'll find," said Wes very dubiously. "What critters we got now ought to be along the bench. Time fer 'em to come down."

"Don't worry," replied the woman, "I'm not easily disappointed, for I don't expect much. If it's only fifteen or twenty head I'll be satisfied. The point is that we want to get them off now. It's an urgent matter, Wes."

"Yes, ma'am," agreed Wes. His eyes were sweeping the country, right and left. Ever and anon, he spurred off to some angle to inspect the ground. After an hour's steady riding, the wrinkles began to appear in his forehead. "Plumb time," he muttered, "fer to git sight of somethin' on four legs. I ain't seen so much as a rabbit yet."

"Well, you know best where to look," remarked the woman. "I'm sure that I don't."

They fell silent. Wes turned toward the left, sidling gradually into the upper folds of the bench. They passed into the lowermost fringe of pines and, by and by, came to a dry creek bed that Wes spent considerable time in reconnoitering. The result of this left him more troubled than ever, and he pressed on at a stiffer pace. After twenty minutes or so more, they sighted a bald knob rising above the sloping ground and Wes made eagerly for it, Mrs. Chavis behind him. The hired hand stood in his stirrups and with shaded eyes looked off at the country below. Once, he thought, that he saw stock moving and grunted, "There's somethin'." But after a further inspection he shook his head. "No, I'm seein' things. Well, we'll head for Popo Creek."

The woman let him go ahead, contenting herself with surveying the country and marking some of the strange things that the thickening forest afforded her inspection. Indeed, she paid little attention to the hired man's sober grumbling. She had never ceased to love the wide-flung land of the West, with its immense distances and its grotesque monuments wrought in sand and rock. Yet, ironically enough, almost from the first day of her arrival in it, six years back, she had been tied to the ranch house with incessant duties. Naturally enough, then, this excursion was akin to a vacation.

Her attention was brought back by a hail from Wes who was far ahead, framed between the trunks of two trees. She plodded along until she saw the trouble on his face and his arm pointing earthward. "Can you read signs, ma'am? There's a plumb interestin' story for anybody," he commented.

She followed his gesture. Scuffed in the earth were many tracks, which seemed to her to be those of cattle. Under his silent guidance, she lifted her gaze along the trail that the prints took, away upward into the distance. "I'm not an expert, Wes. You tell me what it means."

"There's hosses' shoes alongside that trail, ma'am, and it means plenty. Somebody has been keepin' comp'ny with them critters, and usually it ain't etiquette for folks to mingle with other folks' cows."

"Then it means——" Helen Chavis began.

"Well, it can mean several things, but it looks unreasonable to me. I'm a plumb suspicious feller that way. Let's look a little further," Wes replied.

After that they clung to the cattle trail, mounting the slope, dodging into dry creek beds, and skirting thicker stands of timber. The woman, now alert, found that the trail went steadily eastward, away from the Box M range and, in time, turned somewhat so as to

go down into the desert again. The sun, she noticed, was throwing longer shadows from the western horizon and finally, oppressed by the distance that they must be from home, she called a halt.

"We're getting pretty well away from the ranch house, Wes. Don't you think that we'd better call it a day and strike back?" she asked.

He brought up. "Mebbe you're right, ma'am. This trail looks like a long one. I'll hit out bright an' early in the mornin' and git to the end of this affair."

It was dusk, merging into darkness, when they got to the ranch house again. Helen's daughter was standing anxiously on the porch. "Mama, I got worried. Don't you go away like that without telling me," she said.

"All right, lovey, I won't," her mother promised her.

Itchy floated out of the darkness, looked at the woman with a face twisted in nervous fear, and hunched his shoulders as if expecting some one to steal up from behind. The man was a coward when left to himself after dark, seldom permitting some sort of companion from his sight. The woman was struck with quick pity. "What is it, Itchy?"

"Ma'am, there's somethin' hidin' out beyond the crick. I know it! Heard the brush crack once er twice," he said.

"It's your imagination again, Itchy. Go sit in the kitchen with Mrs. Linkamon."

He mumbled something and pulled up his shirt collar. The fog was settling down, damp and chilly. The perpetual night breeze rustled the tree tops, setting the underbrush in a flutter of sounds. Itchy shook his head at the offer and followed Wes away toward the bunk house, half trotting, in the manner of some animal.

Mrs. Chavis went through the house to the kitchen and, after washing, sat down at the table. Mrs. Linkamon began to talk of the afternoon's work. "About three o'clock, a car come by an' saw our sign. I set table with dinner left-overs. Six there was, and I was completely took off my feet, havin' so little to offer 'em. But they seemed to like leavings. Six road construction men in a little car so terribly rusted that I never thought that it would run. They——"

Suddenly the peace and warm security of the kitchen were utterly shattered. A shot, then another, broke the night, and hard upon these came a scream—a man's scream, so unusual and so piercing as to make Mrs. Linkamon draw her breath and turn deathly white. The scream stopped in a gasp and was repeated again, rising to an unearthly shrillness, dying away, at last, and leaving the ranch to brood over a fearful, expectant stillness. Mrs. Chavis rose from her chair, eyes wide. Running to the door she called across the black clearing, "Wes—Itchy—oh, Wes, where are you?"

Nothing came back to her but her own echo. Mrs. Linkamon was breathing harshly. "Don't you dare go out there, honey! There's death in that meadow!" she said.

But Helen Chavis had already gone. She ran across the ground, stumbling in the gravel of the road and nearly falling. Her ankle struck something sharp, and she heard a ripping of her riding breeches. All these were minor sensations in that terrible moment. And at every pace she sent out her cry—"Wes—Itchy—where are you?"

She found out all too soon. At the very door of the bunk house, wherein a lamp burned fitfully, her foot struck a soft and yielding object. It came over her in a wave of horror, even before she knelt, what that object was. Her groping hands reached a man's outstretched arm. Then, as her eyes became accustomed to the darkness and

the bunk house lamp rose to a brighter gleam, she had a vision of Wes staring at her from the ground, sightless. Her exploring fingers touched his chest and came away, sticky with blood.

"Wes!" she cried. "Wes!"

But there was no answer. The man was past all that. Rising, the woman turned about. "Itchy! Itchy, come here!" she called.

It seemed as if all things conspired to keep the silence, for there was no sound of the shiftless one. It was almost more than flesh could endure. Helen Chavis broke ground and fled back to the kitchen. "Honey!" breathed Mrs. Linkamon, "What is it?"

"Wes—dead. Itchy—I can't find him! There's a murderer out in those trees! Oh, the fiend, the devil! Where's the lantern, Mrs. Linkamon?"

Suddenly the drumming of hoofs came to them, sounding from directly across the bridge. To their ears it was thunderously loud; in the count of ten it had diminished to a mere whisper and, at last, was lost in the lower part of the road where the desert bordered the trees.

"What you want a lantern for, honey?" Mrs. Linkamon asked.

Helen Chavis had found it herself and lit it with speeding fingers. "I'm going to saddle a horse and go for help. Sonny, you run into the front room and get both guns there. They're already loaded. Watch over sister and Mrs. Linkamon," she ordered.

With that admonition she was scurrying toward the barn. In a brief time, she had a fresh pony saddled and was galloping up the steep and precipitous road that wound along the rim of Murderer's Creek. It was a lonely, dismal ride, with the ever present fear of some one's riding behind or waiting in front. The coyotes howled mournfully from the slopes, and the night wind groaned in the trees. She knew not how long it took to reach Lon Marshall's house. It seemed like eternity before the bright light from his window met her eyes. She slid off the horse and pounded on the door. The scrape of a chair met her ears, and presently Marshall opened the portal—a pipe burning in his mouth, and a book in his hand. It was a fleeting picture, for the sight of her face made him throw the book behind and exclaim in startled wonder, "Helen—Mrs. Chavis—what have you been seein'?"

"I need your help now, Lon. Some one shot and killed Wes from ambush! Itchy has vanished!" she said.

CHAPTER IV.

SESTERIS.

LON MARSHALL pulled Helen Chavis into the house and almost, by force, put her into his chair by the fireplace. "Sing!" he shouted. "Hop Sing!"

A Chinese boy poked his head from an inner door. "Yeh, Missa Marshall?"

"Get this lady a cup of coffee right away. Hustle now." The rancher started for the door, catching up his belt and holster on the way. "You stay right there," he directed, "until I get my horse saddled. All the boys went to town this morning, except Sig Cowan, but he'll have to do in this case. Better get closer to that fire. It's mighty damp out." He vanished in the darkness, sending a hail across to the bunk house. "Oh, Sig! Roll out! Trouble ahead! Hustle now. Get your horse and gun."

The Chinese boy shuffled across the room with coffee and cookies. Mrs. Chavis took the coffee, but waved the pastry away. The hot liquid took some of the chill from her body, and staved off the inevitable reaction which, for a moment, had threatened her nerves and muscles. Marshall's booming voice was in itself enough to infuse courage and, by the time he and his puncher rode

to the door, she was waiting for them. Swinging into the saddle, she started down the road without a word.

Cowan led the way over and around the precipitous route. Marshall galloped beside the woman, preoccupied with the newly risen trouble. He had been doing a great deal of thinking during the week regarding Sesteris, and now that Wes had gone under, it only furnished added fuel for the conviction that he had about reached. Some one, presumably Sesteris, had killed Wes because the latter knew too much about rustlers. And yet Sesteris was not a man with sufficient ability to carry on operations alone. Though keeping the opinion strictly to himself, Marshall had never been satisfied with the results of the vigilance committee. None of the half dozen men whom they had caught amounted to more than mere hirelings, tools of some one capable enough to watch over the various aims and moves of his subordinates, and too clever to let himself be known to the rank and file. Obviously Sesteris would not answer that description—which left Marshall to the unwelcome conclusion that the master mind of the gang was yet at large. That left Marshall conning his list of acquaintances, and he was honest enough to begin at the very top—among those whom he had always held above reproach. Cattle rustling, he well knew, was something that could easily affect the good and the bad alike, a kind of dry rot that got into men's morals and corrupted them.

The three thundered down grade and swept into the Box M side road, crossed the bridge with a great racket, and were hailed by a treble voice.

"Halt there, or I'll fire! Who's that?"

"It's Sonny on guard," said Mrs. Chavis, between tears and laughter. "All right, Sonny. It's mother."

"Good boy," commended Marshall. He pulled a flash light from his pocket and, with Sig Cowan beside him, cantered toward the bunk house and dismounted. The searching ray swept the ground and stopped on the sprawled figure of Wes.

"Leave it alone," broke in Marshall quickly. "The easiest way for you and me to get in a pack of trouble is to touch that body. Tell you one thing, though: the shot came from right across the creek. Feller ambushed there and when Wes came out of the bunk house with the lamplight playin' on him—bingo! Let's go over."

They walked across the bridge and very cautiously beat through the brush until they stood in a direct line with the bunk house. It was Sig Cowan who first pointed out a spot beaten down beneath a tree—the vines crushed to the ground and footprints sunk in the soft earth. Marshall played his light on the area. "The gent must've been waiting for some little time," he said. "See where he squatted on his heels and gouged in? Now where's that half-wit, Itchy? Better cruise around a little. You go down and I'll go up. Don't be reckless, Sig, because something might jump out and bite you."

But a half hour's search failed to reveal the whereabouts of the shiftless one, and Marshall gave up the effort. "Next thing is to get the coroner and sheriff on the job. Not that I consider the sheriff much force, but that's regulations nowadays. Sig, I guess that you're elected to make the trip. Dust along and yank 'em out of bed. Ought to be back by mornin'."

Sig Cowan rode into the shadows without a word. And Marshall returned to the ranch house where Mrs. Linkamon, true to her training, had set a night lunch, upset though she was. Marshall sat down gratefully. "Ma'am," said he to Helen Chavis, "I've got some ideas on this subject, but I certainly could stand it to have some more. Did you know anything about Wes' friends?"

"No, but there is something that I think may interest you." She told him about the afternoon trip and of the dead man's suspicions. Marshall listened, sipping his coffee. When she had finished, he already had come to a conclusion. "Bright and early to-morrow mornin' I'm taking that trail. Down where Popo Creek fell over the bench, you said? We'll unravel this thing, sure as shootin'," he remarked.

She smiled faintly. "I'm going along," she announced.

"Ma'am, it's apt to be a rough job," Marshall warned her.

"But I'm going," she told him. "And here is something else that's been in my mind for hours. Call it a woman's intuition, or anything that you will, but still I've got it in me. To-day I found out that Booth Talant had bought my notes from the bank. And right afterward he came to the ranch and offered to cancel the notes and pay me something for the place."

It took Lon Marshall with all the force of a blow. There are certain vague and imperceptible suspicions that often lay in the back of people's minds and worry them, although they never know quite why, until a chance word or a sudden flash of character illumines everything. Thus it was with the rancher. He set down his coffee cup, with his rugged face lighting from excitement. Without stopping to trace the reasons therefor, he dismissed all other names from his mental list and closed his search. Here was the master mind capable of disturbing the cattle trade and, at the same time, of keeping himself under cover. A dozen instances, each one meaningless in itself but making a convincing total, of Talant's sly temper came to him and he got up from his chair with a gusty phrase.

"Ma'am, it may take a long time to prove it, but we're on the way to snaring our turkey now," he said. "We're off right early in the mornin'. You folks had all better turn in. I'll be sleepin' on the couch in the front room."

At first dawn, with the fog hanging thick and low over the island, they were off—going down the road and turning into the bench. After a bit, the sun came up and dispelled the earth's chill in a few glowing moments. The overcoat became too uncomfortable, and Mrs. Chavis slipped out of hers and hung it across the saddle, somehow unaccountably glad to have Lon Marshall riding with her. Not that she was lacking in courage, but the course of affairs was turning all too swiftly into rougher channels and needed a wisdom of lawless ways that she did not possess. This was the manner of cattle country. It seemed an open, smiling country, with equal opportunity for all. Then, presently, the newcomer began to be aware of undercurrents. Pleased faces and hospitable words masked entirely different thoughts.

As the day lengthened, Helen Chavis was all the more grateful for the man's presence. She tried to point out the landmarks of the previous trip; but she found, after they had gone on two or three fruitless quests, that one bald butte looked like many another, and the pine trees and dry creek beds were confusing to the unpracticed eye.

"I guess that I'm not going to be any help," she confessed. "Yet it seemed so plain that I thought that I could find my way any time."

"A little knocking about on a horse will remedy that," said Marshall. "Traveling in this country is like sailin' a ship across the ocean—it requires experience. From the way you've described the land I believe that we'll hit directly north. It sticks in my mind that you were near where Popo Creek takes a jog to the left."

They went on silently. Helen Chavis was not one to engage in small talk, and the man was thoroughly engrossed in

sweeping the terrain with long, studious glances. The farther that they advanced the more he seemed to draw into his thoughts, a quality that the woman had observed in Wes the previous afternoon. They left the uneven, sparsely covered land of the bench and penetrated the pines, dodging from slope to slope. The sun crept upward and the heat grew. Of a sudden Marshall, who was leading by some paces, halted and pointed a gloved hand. Mrs. Chavis found herself looking again at the tangle of cattle tracks in the soft earth.

"This was the place Wes brought me," she agreed. "He seemed to find something interesting in them—the tracks—I mean."

"Shouldn't wonder that he did," said Marshall. His body swung and he leaned against the pommel, staring at the ground. Mrs. Chavis heard him grunt softly, and then obediently urged her horse onward as he struck still deeper into the hill country. "Can't be much doubt of that story," he remarked. "Only question is how much ridin' we've got to do to catch up. If you'll come a little faster, ma'am——" he suggested.

The trail was broad and plain, and Mrs. Chavis made an attempt to guess the number of cattle that had been in the bunch. The men of the country, she knew, had a way of judging; but the more she looked the less she saw, and finally appealed to Marshall. "Was this a big band?"

"Don't look to be more'n twenty—or thirty head," said Marshall. "And just one man pushin' 'em on."

At the end of a half hour, the trail curved eastward and began to quarter down grade. They passed through a natural meadow and, in a little while, struck a trail. At this point, the tracks turned again and Marshall stopped to consider. He went on ahead for fifty yards or so and returned, casting a glance at the sky through a gap of the tree tops. "Mrs. Chavis," said he, "there's a cabin up that trail, not more'n a quarter of a mile. It's in my mind that I could take a short cut, because I think that I know where this feller was headin'. But I'll be wantin' to keep pretty well from sight, and if you won't object I'd like to have you stay in that cabin until I come back."

"Whatever you say," was Helen Chavis' reply.

"Come along, then, and I'll show you the place."

They rode swiftly up the trail and came in sight of the cabin. It was such a structure as is often found in the hills. Built, once upon a time, for settlers or for trappers, it had been deserted and left to the fortunes of the forest. Vines crept over the sill, and the windows were broken in; but even yet it was used by travelers, as evidenced by sundry boxes and cans. Marshall spoke a little regretfully.

"It isn't any palace, and I hate to leave you here alone. But it shouldn't take me long. I'll be back as much as possible before sundown."

"I'm not afraid, Lon," she said.

It was the second time that she had called him by that name. The effect on the man was curious. He flushed, then looked at her with unusual earnestness. "I'll be back right soon," he promised, "and if any man should wander along to insult you, I'll kill him!" Without waiting for an answer, he whirled and galloped back to the crossing of the cattle trail.

"There ain't but one place that feller could be headin' for," he murmured, striking into the trees, "and that's right down to the quicksands in Devil's Marsh. Why, dog-gone the skunk, he must be meanin' to wipe the Box M cattle off the map!"

He abandoned the trail and went down the slope, aiming to reach the marsh by a more direct route. The farther he went the more cautious he became and, at last, dropped off the

horse, tethered it, and proceeded on foot.

"What I just don't see," he said, "is why the gent had to take such a roundabout way with the critters. It's a good five miles extra accordin' to the trail he's made."

The trees began to thin. At the end of another twenty minutes, he had reached the bench and was advancing very cautiously from gully to gully. It was not in any sense a traveled country; in fact, the Box M range and those adjoining were farthest removed from settled land. Loneliness and a sense of wildness pervaded it. Here, more than in any other region of the State, were signs of abundant game. And here, too was the last refuge of those men, who had found it dangerous to be within easy striking distance of the law. The forest behind the bench afforded wonderful refuge, while the occasional hummocks of land, rising up as vantage points, made it possible for fugitives to watch the desert below.

Marshall advanced to the top of a ridge and dropped on his stomach. Directly below him was another log cabin —an isolated, half fallen relic of some one's hopeful days. But what was more interesting to the rancher was the fact that the coals of a camp fire gleamed by the doorstep. And, as he surveyed the place, he heard the rustle of brush, followed by the appearance of a man with a burly body and the eyes of a wary animal. It was Sesteris returning from some observation point of his own. The man looked around the edges of the bowl carefully, and vanished in the cabin—to return presently with his blanket roll. Going again into the thicket, he came back with his horse and began to lash on the blanket roll. Marshall stood up and started down hill.

Sesteris had lived too long in the open country to miss the slightest of sounds. So Marshall had no more than raised his body, when the burly one snapped around surprisingly swiftly, his hand flashing toward his gun. Marshall's weapon was already out to forestall him. "Hold it, Sesteris," he said. "I'm not goin' to engage in a contest with you. Put your hands up! Up higher, you're not muscle bound! Now show me your back. That's right." The rancher moved quickly forward and removed Sesteris' gun. "You boys certainly do get in the habit of arguin' matters," he continued.

"You got nuthin' on me," growled Sesteris. "What's all this about?"

"You started it, feller, not me," Marshall reminded him.

That reassured Sesteris a little, and he grew bolder. Marshall prodded him with the muzzle of the forty-five. "Not so soon," he said.

"Oh, well, a gent gets sort of in the habit of reachin' for protection in these trees. I guess that I was a bit nervous," Sesteris tried to explain.

Marshall shook the lariat from Sesteris' saddle and, in a few rapid turns, had secured the man's wrist's behind him. The latter growled his protest. "I'll get some satisfaction fer this, you c'n bet," he declared.

"Plenty," agreed Marshall. "Now, boy, I want the true dope on the Box M cattle. Don't spend any time foolin' with me. I already know somethin' about your moves, and I know that you warned Chavis to clear the country. That puts you in bad."

"I don't know nuthin', I told you," answered Sesteris, his face sullen. "You ain't got a thing on me, nor you can't prove that I warned Chavis. See?"

"No? Which means that you must've been the person who ambushed Wes." Marshall's eyes swept the renegade's face for signs of betrayal. But Sesteris was a hard man to confuse. He had been too long on the solitary and lawless path to turn color now. Whatever his faults, he, at least, had courage.

"Which is something also to be proved," he sneered.

"Mighty set on proof," mused Lon Marshall. Then he tried stratagem. "But it won't do you any good, for your boss has given you the double cross. You didn't figure that he'd shield you, did you?"

"What?" yelled Sesteris, trying to raise his hands. Crimson flooded his stubbled face. "The mischief he has!" Then he dropped his anger, grinning slyly. "Thought you'd ketch me, eh? Oh, no you won't," he said. Then he broke into vehement oaths, for Marshall was searching his coat pockets. "Get out of my clothes, dang you! I'll see you pay fer all this meddlin', Marshall!"

The rancher's fingers ran against a slip of paper in the bottom of Sesteris' coat—something that appeared to be of value from the manner in which the man twisted and cursed. Marshall drew it forth and smoothed it between his palms. At first glance, he could make nothing of it. A few dim lines were scratched across the face of the paper by a pen, each line being bordered by an unevenly written word. Turning it from side to side, the rancher, at last, got the key. It was a rude map of the district, beginning at the Box M ranch house and ending with the word, "quicksands." At intervals were small dots, and Marshall began to note that the route of the inked line studiously avoided these dots. Comprehension came to him all of a sudden.

"Oh, I get it now," he said. "That's why you took those cows roundabout to reach the marsh. Somebody tipped you off to the watchers that we had out, and that was to show you how to avoid 'em. Clever idea, Sesteris. But it'll hang you—don't forget that. You should have burnt this paper, feller. That's Talant's handwriting and it'll hang him, too. Now boost yourself on the cayuse. We're goin' for a ride."

But he had not been paying close enough attention to the silent renegade. The latter, facing Marshall all the while, had stood with his shoulders hunched forward, red eyes glaring belligerently. He kept his position, as if he had not heard the order.

"Snap," said Marshall. "I'm not talkin' for the pleasure of it. Climb into the saddle."

The mischief was done. Sesteris sprang forward across the yard of intervening space with his hands sweeping forward—hands that had unaccountably worked themselves loose from the rope. It had not been a very thorough piece of trussing in the first place, as Marshall had intended it to be only a temporary precaution. He slipped aside, with a half uttered warning, trying to raise the gun in his hand. Sesteris struck him with the full force of a bulky body, and together the two of them went rolling on the ground. There was no cessation in that struggle. The renegade fought with all the anger in him, slogging away with both fists, and trying to jam his knees into the rancher's stomach. Marshall wrenched his arm free, and brought down the barrel of his gun in the general direction of Sesteris' head. Then a handful of earth was flung in his face, and he was blinded and left choking for breath. A cruel blow struck him on the groin and he felt Sesteris rising. Through a film of light, he found the man stooping for the second gun, which had fallen a few yards away. When he got another momentary glimpse, Sesteris was swinging around with the gun upraised. Marshall took a quick aim and fired thrice.

He heard Sesteris fall, and presently the man sighed as if deadly tired. A voice—nothing more than a trailing whisper—came to him. "You win, friend. But you ain't able to say that Al Sesteris didn't play his cards fer all they was worth."

The pain in Marshall's eyes was

tremendous. But, by and by, he began to see better, the tears washing the dirt away; and, on looking around, he saw the renegade lying face down on the earth, one fist still gripping his weapon. Rising, Marshall limped over and put a palm to the man's heart. Sesteris was beyond all help. He had elected to make his fight, plunging forward the way that he had always done, and he had lost. Still, the rancher felt a certain regret for his passing—the regret that any man feels at the snuffing out of courage, no matter how evil that courage may be.

"Wasn't much to choose from, though," he mused, looking at the ground on which the evidence of the short fight was deeply marked. "Either he or I. Now I guess that I'd better put him in the cabin, and send the boys over to take care of him to-night."

Sesteris' horse had gone on fifty yards and stood with his head down in the grass. Marshall picked up the dead man, put him on the cabin bunk, and closed the door. Going to the horse, he climbed gingerly into the saddle and turned back to where he had left Helen Chavis. On the way, he found his own animal, changed over, and led Sesteris' mount behind. The need for caution had disappeared and he traveled at a greater speed, casting up accounts in his mind. He had failed to follow the trail of the Box M cattle to the end. But he was so sure of their fate, that it seemed wiser to return for the woman and take her home before it got too late in the day. The other affair could wait. The next most pressing job was to get hold of Booth Talant before he had an opportunity to learn of the fate of his subordinate.

Coming to the trail, Marshall swung forward to the cabin where he had left Mrs. Chavis. Within sight of it, he sent forward a hail, expecting to see her framed in the doorway. But she did not answer, nor was her horse visible. He galloped up to the place and, feeling strangely dissatisfied, got down and went forward. But she was not inside of the unkempt room—nor could Marshall find her within the small clearing. Going on behind the cabin twenty or thirty yards, his eyes lighted on hoof-prints. Not of one horse, but of two. And, at the very point where the clearing gave way to the trees, he saw one of the woman's gloves lying crumpled on the ground. As he stood there, puzzled as to the meaning of those hoof-prints and the deserted glove, he was assailed by a woman's scream coming from far up in the trees.

CHAPTER V.

KIDNAPED.

WHEN Lon Marshall left her at the cabin, Helen Chavis took a turn about the small clearing and came back to tie her horse to one of the near by pines. It was very hot in the forest, with the strong aromatic smell of conifers rising on all sides. The sun, now and then, gleamed through the canopy of limbs to remind the woman of the cold water rushing down the cañon at the ranch house, and of the grateful breeze that always seemed to blow between the high rock walls.

"After all," said she, plowing the ground with the toe of her boot, "there is hardly a place in the country as good to live in as the ranch house of the Box M."

She put her head inside the cabin—a little distrustful of the semi-dark interior. All manner of refuse was scattered over the floor, and cobwebs sheathed the corners and rafters. There was a bunk at one end of the room, partly broken down, but bearing evidence of the last occupant from the lumpy straw tick spread on it. The window was hemmed by a frame, but the glass panes were splintered and scattered on the floor. Directly in the cen-

ter of the place, where a stove once had rested, was a circular pit created by numberless fires. Doubtless the place had served many a line rider or trapper. Helen Chavis retreated, dubious.

"If I were a man, I'd rather spread my blanket under a tree. It looks too full of crawling things to be pleasant," she meditated.

It made her a little philosophic. The more she ranged the hills, the more she began to realize how secluded a life she had lead the past six years. She had been in the West, but she could hardly say that she had been of it. It took a few hints from men like Wes and Marshall to make her see how really ignorant she was and to bring home most forcibly how little Ben Chavis had confided in her. Less than a week had elapsed since his departure, and already the man was assuming the shape of a mysterious and unpleasant myth. Taking a seat on a log just outside the cabin door, she looked frankly at her past. Heretofore, that was something that she had been afraid to do. Now, casting back on her affairs, she was a little astonished at the things that she had endured for the sake of peace, and in the hope that Ben Chavis might change his ways for the better.

"I have been happier in these few days," she admitted to herself, "than for many years. Goodness knows, I don't want to be disloyal, but if Ben ever comes back it will just about kill me. I'd have gone on with him, I know that. He broke up the compact, not me, and now he'll have to abide it. I will never consent to live under the same roof with his silent and unpleasant manners again. I don't have to and I won't!"

"Won't do what, Mrs. Chavis?" a voice suddenly demanded.

That unexpected question came from behind her, and the slow, familiar voice caused a sudden chill to run up her back. She sprang from the log and turned defensively. Booth Talant, smiling in his thin, humorless way, stood with a shoulder to the cabin. His horse was standing behind the structure browsing in the grass, evidence that the man had come forward on foot as stealthily as some animal stalker. It enraged Helen Chavis beyond measure, and she spoke her mind bluntly.

"What did you do that for, Mr. Talant? Are you in the habit of prying on people and sneaking behind them?" she asked.

The thin smile vanished. The charge went quickly home; blood began to suffuse the man's saffron-colored eyes. "Ain't a time to stand on pretty manners," he blurted out. "When a man's in danger, he'll fight in his own fashion. Guess you don't think that I can fight, eh? Well, that's where you and a lot of folks in this county are plumb mistaken. I'm about to fight now, and it'll sure surprise you and your friend, Lon Marshall."

"If there is any danger to you," answered the woman, fascinated by the changing of his temper, "it is certainly of your own making."

"No preaching," warned Talant, stepping forward. Whatever of courtesy he had once worn, faded before the pallor creeping down his cheeks and the flaming crimson of his eyes. The transformation was startling. It altered the whole character of the man and made him sinister, unbalanced, as indeed he was. "No preaching," he repeated, clenching a fist. "I've had enough. Lon Marshall figgers that he c'n clean up this country, an' make a lot of political friends by doin' it. Well, I'll break his heart before I'm through. Show him jest exactly what a little dude he is."

"What have you got against Mr. Marshall?" demanded the woman. "He is the squarest man in this State."

Talant became sardonic. "Yeah? You think so, huh? Well, I reckon that he thinks you're a mighty nice gal, too.

So, I'll jest bust his heart proper. Get on that hoss and come with me," he demanded.

She drew back to avoid his hand. "Keep away from me or I'll quirt you!" she warned, raising the heavy end of the whip.

The weapon fell harmlessly on his shoulder, as he closed in and seized her by the arms. Madness shook his voice. "I'll bust Lon Marshall's heart, don't fergit it! An' I'll teach you to stand against me! Git on that hoss!" he commanded.

She struck his chin with her head and struggled backward. One hand released its grip on her. And the next moment she was hit across the temple with a force that paralyzed her. All strength ebbed from her body, and she felt herself being borne off and thrown bodily into a saddle. As from a remote distance, she heard the man laughing—laughing without amusement.

She never quite lost consciousness. Blinded and dizzy, she was aware of movement, of a hand supporting her, and then of a branch sweeping her face. At last, a fresh alarm invaded her, and she made a supreme effort to shake off the weakness that clutched her body. Her temple throbbed terribly, and a trickle of blood seemed to be creeping down her cheek. Attempting to brush it away, she found that she could not raise her hands. That discovery opened her eyes, and she saw that her wrists were bound to the pommel. Talant rode alongside, one arm steadying her. They had left the clearing and were traveling on an overgrown trail, going always upward toward some unknown destination.

"Come to life again, did you?" growled Talant, removing his arm. "Well, shift for yourself then. And I don't want no holler from you, hear me?"

"Where are you taking me?" the woman demanded.

He leered. "You'll find out later, lady."

"You fool! Don't you see that there'll be some one after you in a very short time? Only a crazy man would attempt what you're attempting. Do you know the penalty in this country for kidnaping? Booth Talant, let me go before it's too late!"

He was as grim as death, breathing heavily through distended nostrils. The woman shot a glance at him and was shocked at the change. Only a crazy man, as she had said, would attempt kidnaping. It was that kind of forlorn and desperate act that could never be erased. No good could come of it, nor could Talant ever expect to show his face in the land again. At one gesture, he was throwing off his position in the community and giving up his possessions.

"Look here," he growled, "I know what I'm doin'. I made a mistake at the beginnin' of this game, an' it's too late to recover. They'll get me, anyhow. That cursed Marshall's to blame fer all the nosin' around! If it wasn't fer him, I'd still be safe. But he changed it, and now I'll make him sorry fer the day he left off mindin' his own business! Oh, I been seein' things! I was where I could watch you an' him come up along the cattle trail. Guess I know what that means, right enough. The game's up fer me, but, when I'm through, other folks'll know jest what trouble is."

"You beast—let me go!"

"Hurts to be where you ain't able to help yourself, don't it?" he muttered. "Well, it'll hurt Lon Marshall all the more. He's kind of sweet on you."

"Where are you taking me?"

He had heard a noise in the brush and was searching the trees with swift, savage glances, one hand on his revolver. Helen Chavis summoned her courage and filled her lungs, sending forth a sustained cry that disturbed

every echo of the forest and rang far away in the glens. Talant cursed and dropped back. His hand swept out and struck her on the mouth. "Stop that or I'll pull your tongue out, s'help me!" And to emphasize his words he slapped her, again and again, until she hung her head and sobbed in pain.

"Oh, if I had a gun I'd kill you!" she cried.

"Well, you ain't got one, so shut your fool mouth!" he told her.

He was distracted by the threshing of the thicket. Helen Chavis raised her face in time to see a ragged, half-naked figure stumble into sight. For an instant, she thought that it was some stray hermit of the hills, but a second glance told her another story. That sorry spectacle was no other than Itchy—with his face swollen by insect bites and his lips split by thirst. He stared at the two, with eyes that mirrored a demented mind, weaving from side to side as if he were about to collapse. Then he emitted a scream, scrambled about, and flung himself from sight. Talant jerked out his gun and sent a volley of shots after the man, to the horror of Helen Chavis. But they were futile shots, for she heard Itchy crashing through the vines for many minutes until, at last, the sound died in the distance.

"Loony," muttered Talant. "Plumb loony. He's another man I'd like to kill."

The woman understood the situation without being told. Never a strong character, Itchy had seen something on the fateful night previous sufficient to overthrow his unbalanced mind. And Talant's animus could rise from no other source than guilt. Had he been the one to kill Wes? The thought gave a more ominous note to the whole proceedings.

After that, they traveled faster, and the woman noticed that she was being led toward another quarter of the country—almost directly eastward according to the sun that threw its long shadows after them. Pheasants beat before them, drumming the air with their wings; sultriness held the forest in its grip. Not a word was spoken for better than an hour, while the trees began to thin and the land assumed a rockier, more barren aspect. It came to Mrs. Chavis that they were going toward the country on the extreme edge of the Box M range. She had often heard the men talk of it as a difficult stretch to pass with a horse. A gorge cut its way through narrow and deep rock walls. And, beyond this, she knew not how far, was the State line.

"I warn you again," said she, "there will be a posse after you within four hours. And likely Lon Marshall is following now. Do you think that you can escape? You know that you can't. Turn me loose before it is too late to mend matters."

"D'you figger that your fine hero is comin'?" he leered. "Well, so do I! That's why I'm runnin' off with you. I want him to come. He'll stumble into the finest mess of trouble that he ever heard of. It's been a long, long time that I've wanted to square accounts with him, and now is my chance."

"You have gone mad," said the woman scornfully. "It will take a better man than you are, Booth Talant, to hurt him. As for me—you can't take me much farther. If I suffer you will, too, and ten times worse. Believe what I say. Once I get back to the Box M, I'll bend every effort to catch you."

He stared at her with more reason in his face than he had displayed in the whole afternoon. "Got spunk, ain't you? Reckon that you'd help a man along in the world quite some. But I misdoubt you'll ever see the Box M again. My mind's set."

A shot echoed behind them and, at the sound, Helen Chavis brightened. "There is your proof! Do you think that you can escape?" she asked.

"Shut up before I lay my hand across your face!" Talant spurred his horse, and picked a trail through the rocks. The woman caught sight of a black, jagged area ahead, between the stunted pines. Within fifteen minutes those pines were to the rear, and they had embarked on a slow journey across the lava rock, skirting craters, and steering slowly over small ridges. From time to time, the man cast a long glance behind and seemed greatly pleased. Always he aimed for a certain commanding point and, at last, when the sun was half over the western horizon, he drew up.

"We'll wait fer your brave Mr. Marshall right here" he said.

It was a forbidding place, to be sure. The lava bunched up to form a rough mound, honeycombed by small entrances not much larger than a man's shoulders. Between this dark citadel and the pines stretched a mile or so of rugged terrain—which they had just crossed—that would reveal any pursuing posse. Helen Chavis went on a few paces with her horse and then involuntarily cried, "whoa!" The mound slid away toward a cañon, the sides of which went sharply down for a distance of four or five hundred feet. It made her slightly dizzy.

"There comes your friend!" exulted Talant, pointing.

The woman looked toward the lines. A solitary figure had dismounted and was walking forward as swiftly as he could. Talant released the hands of Mrs. Chavis and spoke roughly, "Get down an' perch on top of that rock. Let 'im see you sufferin'!"

She hesitated. It was undoubtedly Lon Marshall, coming at a rate that left no doubt of his temper. He would not halt or temporize with Talant. And only one look at the latter's dead-white face and blazing eyes were needed to tell of his purpose. In the tragic explosion to follow, some one would die. For all her courage, the woman began to tremble. Talant swung on her savagely. "I told you to get up there! Hustle!" he said.

"Booth Talant, do you understand what this must end in? Stop this madness!"

He struck her again, and gripped her arm until she moaned. Thus, by force, he dragged her to the summit of the mound and stood there in plain sight of the advancing Marshall. The latter, now close enough to view the two, hastened his stride until he was trotting. Talant drew his revolver and filled the cylinder, spinning it. Something in the man had snapped, some last strand of common sense that had held him down. That long, smoldering fire, which the woman had noted so often in the past, had consumed his mind.

From the corner of her vision, Helen Chavis saw something moving across the lava at another angle dodging and dropping. Whatever it was, she gave it little notice, for her attention was riveted on Marshall. He walked in haste, hatless and with his long arms swinging loosely at his side. Talant gave a laugh and sent a careless shot in his direction. "Come on and settle it!" he yelled. Then he put an arm around Helen Chavis and leered, as she beat against his face and chest. "Protection," said he. "He can't shoot now. I'll slaughter the fool, when he gets close enough!"

Marshall, within fifty yards, raised his voice. "I'm askin' you to give up, Talant. Drop your gun and let go of that woman!" he said.

"Oh, no! It won't be so easy as all that!" cried Talant. "If you want Mrs. Chavis you'll have to come after her! Kind of hurts to see me holdin' her, don't it? Come on, you prayin' skunk! I'll give you a taste of bad medicine!"

"I'm warnin' you again," said Marshall, moving slowly, gun still in the holster. "I'm comin' on. Give up and take your medicine. If I lay hands on

you, I'll break your spine. That gun ain't worrying me at all. You can't shoot straight to-day. Do you give up?"

Talant ripped out an oath and fired again. The bullet went wide of its mark. Helen Chavis pulled at his arm, until he swung the weapon on her. "Another move like that, lady, and I'll kill you!" he said.

Marshall advanced, well within bullet's range. His long face was stone cold, and he looked at Talant through narrow eyes, talking all the while with a monotonous drone. "You ain't got the courage of a toad, Talant. Afraid to die, so you hide behind a woman. Bah! Sesteris passed out like a man, but you never was half of what he was. Better take firmer hold of that gun, feller, because it's shakin' now. Ain't a bullet in that piece big enough to hit me. I'm goin' to break your back with my hands!"

This was a Marshall whom the woman had never seen. Here was a killer, a man who prophesied death with a dreadful satisfaction—a man who walked contemptuously into the face of a maniac's gun.

Talant breathed heavily. There was a rattle in his throat. "I'm waitin' for you to come closer, Lon," said he. "When you make a right fair target I'll knock you over."

"Why, you ain't got the courage," replied Marshall, moving forward with the same steady gait. "Your hand shakes. You know that you're as good as dead now. When a dog goes mad, we kill him, Booth, and that's just what I'm goin' to do this next minute!"

Helen Chavis marveled, between horror and fright. Lon Marshall was gambling the effect of his words against Talant's nerve, closing up the distance meanwhile. He was not more than fifteen yards away, when she heard the latter chuckle. "Guess that I'll quit playin' with you now, Lon. Never was a man on earth I hated more. Always set yourself against me. Now cash your chips!"

The gun came down from its poised position. Helen Chavis screamed, and threw all that remained of her strength into one tremendous shove. The gun roared and Marshall went down; the woman thought that he had been struck and she fought at Talant in a frenzy. The next that she knew Marshall's body was before her vision, and Talant went sliding backward, out of her grasp, with Marshall following.

She had never seen men fight before, which made this struggle all the more terrible. For the two were locked together, swaying from side to side, arm groping for arm, and the revolver's muzzle teetering from sky to earth and, ever and anon, veering toward one man or the other. Marshall had boasted to kill with his bare hands, and it seemed to be that he meant it; never a motion did he make toward his own holster. A haze spread before the woman's eyes. Through it she saw the gun drop harmlessly to the ground and, by and by, a heel kicked it out of danger, sending it clattering down the side of the mound. Talant's face swept toward her—frightful from the swelling blood vessels and the absence of reason in the rolling eyes. Something flecked his lips. Marshall crumpled and went down on one knee. A fist buried itself in his neck. He fell back, head striking the jagged points of the lava rock. At that point the haze turned blood red and Helen Chavis, all unknowing, began to scour the mound for a loose rock. There was none to be had and, when she looked again, the fortune of the fight had veered, traveling toward that dreadful conclusion which Lon Marshall had forecasted. Talant's body was slowly being crushed between two wrapping arms. The man's head sank back and his teeth flashed, lips drawn in agony. Helen Chavis cried, "Stop, Lon!" and turned away.

Another cry, more terrified, brought her around. Marshall stood alone on the summit of the mound, feet apart, head thrust between his shoulders and with his hands moving aimlessly in the air. She rushed forward and looked down the steep cañon wall. Talant had fallen, the dust rising behind his precipitous path; but he had not gone the full length of that precipice. Twenty feet below, he had caught at a splinter of lava rising from the incline and there he rested, slowly groping for safety.

"Let him live," said the woman.

Marshall nodded. "But I was in a frame of mind to kill him a minute ago. When I saw him holding you——"

"Look!" cried the woman.

From some crater near by, the half-naked figure of Itchy appeared. He dashed to the precipice, took one look at the prone figure of Talant, and then shot downward toward him. Before the two could move, the mad ranch hand had reached the pinnacle. Talant's arms stretched toward him for help and his lips moved. Itchy screamed, kicked the groping hands away and, with an effort that must have been immense for so slight a figure, heaved Talant clear of the pinnacle. The dust rose high and, through it, Itchy appeared, an insecure instrument of vengeance lifting his arm to shake it at the sky. Then he lost his balance and fell, following Talant down the ever-narrowing chasm. Marshall put an arm about the woman and drew her away.

The fresh morning sun sparkled on Murderer's Creek and dispelled the night fog, playing on the freshly-painted houses and the green meadows. Inside the ranch house Mrs. Linkamon was bustling around with the breakfast dishes, while the hired men were rolling toward the bunk house and the day's work. Into this pleasant scene of industry, rode Lon Marshall. The bridge rumbled beneath him and, when he came sweeping up the driveway, he was met by Helen Chavis.

"You are very early, Lon," said she.

"Come from town," he replied. "Lawyer Dan Rounds told me that you should come in and sign some papers. When that's done the ranch is yours, free and clear."

"And nothing to pay on the notes I owe?" she demanded.

"Nary a red cent. A court action's cleared it up. You see, Talant didn't leave any relation nor any will. And there wasn't any record of what he did with your notes. So the sum an' substance of it seems to be that you're that much richer. For all practical purposes, they don't exist and Dan said that he's got it squared around and the title cleared."

"Well," she mused, "I'm glad to be relieved of the burden, but I wouldn't want to cheat any one. It's a just debt."

"Only man you owed the debt to is dead, leavin' no record of what you owed, or no descendants. Why worry? By the way, there's a question I'd certainly like to ask, ma'am."

"Yes?" prompted Helen Chavis, appearing a little flustered.

"No news from Ben Chavis?" he asked.

"None," said she, "nor wanted."

"Well, it's this way. I sure do mean to come around and be a little more neighborly. That is, I mean——"

She was very thoughtful. "There is so much that must be straightened out. Folks can't break off so suddenly without leaving tangled ends and odds. But if later you'd care to——"

"Why, ma'am," said Lon Marshall, turning a brick red to the roots of his hair, "I'd kill a man——"

"Hush! I know what you would do for me. You've had a damp, raw ride. Come in and let me pour you some coffee and fix a bite. Really, Lon, you should take better care of your health. It's valuable to me."

The Key Log

By Reginald C. Barker

Author of "The Year of No Rabbits," etc.

THERE were a million and a half feet of logs on the rollways at Tibbett & Thompson's logging camp on Clear Creek when Pete Skyling asked "White Water" Bill Casey for a job.

"River hog?" asked the boss.

"Sir?"

"Slough pig?"

Puzzled and angry, the wide-shouldered, slim-legged young fellow met the appraising look of the big river boss with a glance that was almost belligerent.

"I'm afraid I don't get you," he said quietly.

"Huh!" snorted White Water. "Thought you was a green hand soon as I saw you; bet you never worked a day in the woods in your life."

"You win," said the applicant for work, "my line is structural steel."

"Structural what?" It was White Water's turn to be puzzled.

"Helping to build the steel frames of skyscrapers," elucidated Pete Skyling. "Wanted a change, though, so thought I'd tackle the woods for a while."

White Water rubbed his red, stubbled chin with a hand almost the size of a ham.

"Don't like to put a green hand on the log drive," he grumbled, "but seeing as I'm short of men——" He glanced down at the shoes of the newcomer. "Go down to the commissary and tell the clerk to fit you out with a pair of calked boots; they'll be charged against your wages. I'll give you a chance on the rear in the morning."

Pete Skyling had not the faintest idea what the boss meant by "the rear," but he did as he was told and entered the commissary in search of the calked boots.

"The boss told me," he began; then suddenly he doffed his hat and cleared his throat, for behind the counter a girl was seated in a roughly made rocking-

chair, doing something with a needle and thread.

"Something you wanted?" she asked, rising.

"I—er—hum," stammered Pete. "The foreman told me to come here and get a pair of cork boots; same to be charged against my wages."

"Calked, you mean, don't you?" she suggested sweetly. "What size, and do you wish Cutter's or B & H's?"

"I—er—I guess I shall have to leave that to you, Miss——"

"I'm Fern Casey," she said helpfully, "the boss' daughter."

She opened a ledger which lay on the counter, "Name, please."

With his calked boots beneath his arm, ten minutes later Pete entered the low, log bunk house and plumped himself down on one of the long benches which, parallel with a double tier of bunks, ran the length of the building. From a wooden rack above a great box heater there hung an array of muddy socks, damp woolen shirts and stagged overalls; beneath a six-paned window at the farther end of the bunk house stood a rough table upon which lay a few dog-eared magazines, a scattered pack of playing cards and a can of tobacco. Near the door stood a barrel of water and a wash bench upon which were three white-enameled wash pans. Two lamps hanging from the ceiling swung slightly in the breeze which drifted through the open door.

Sitting on the bench, Pete gazed at the shining steel calks in the sole of one of the boots which he held in his hand, but he was thinking of something else.

"Fern Casey," he murmured, "bet she's not a day over nineteen, and she's got the prettiest eyes I ever saw." Then, as a distant rumbling rolled down the cañon, he arose and strode outside.

In front of the bunk house an old man in a red shirt was sawing a four-foot dry pine log into lengths for the heating stove; he stopped his saw as he noticed that the stranger came out of the bunk house, and surveyed him out of his one good eye.

"Howdy," he remarked.

Pete Skyling returned the greeting. "Thought I heard it thunder," he said.

"Hey?" The aged sawyer cupped a hand to a hairy ear, then, as he caught Pete's meaning, he grinned.

"That warn't thunder," he said. "White Water and his gang is bustin' rollways up the creek. Guess you ain't no timber beast or you'd a knowed that."

Pete seated himself on the end of the log as his informant dashed oil on the six-and-half-foot saw out of a bottle which held a grooved stopper whittled from a piece of yellow pine bark.

"Say," he questioned, "just what are 'river hogs,'" 'slough pigs' and 'timber beasts?'"

"River hogs is the name given by the boys to them as works the main log drive," explained the old woodsman with a pitying glance. "Slough pigs are the waders who bring up the rear; and timber beasts are—well, I reckon I'm a timber beast, a logger who can take any place in the woods, from bull cook; like I am now, to woods boss, like I useter be."

"Then," said Pete Skyling, "I reckon I'm going to be a slough pig, for the boss said he was going to give me a job on the rear."

"If you've never worked at it, son," advised the bull cook, "it might be a good idee for you to take a walk down to the bridge and see the logs come down. It'll give you some notion of what you're up against."

The rasp of the big saw followed Pete Skyling as he strode down to "the bridge," a single pine log, no more than ten inches in diameter, which spanned the roaring white waters of Clear Creek. To his intense amazement Fern Casey was seated on the center of it, watching the logs come down.

The foot log was fifteen feet above the water down which the advance guard of the log drive was hurrying to the Payette River. Thousands and thousands of logs of all sizes and lengths were jostling, leaping and bouncing against each other beneath the surge of the ten-mile current. Sometimes, like a great yellow face trying to peer above a crowd, the sawed butt of a four-foot pine would rise above the smaller logs, only to drop back beneath the surface as the others crowded it from the rear; once a rough-barked monster rose almost vertically, reaching within a foot of the yellow-haired girl's swinging feet, before dropping back on the others with a crash that sent a shower of spray into Fern's face. Laughingly she wiped the glistening drops from her eyes and called to Pete Skyling.

"See them come, mister! Just watch them come; watch the logs come down!"

To her astonishment, he did not hesitate, but stepped on the foot log in his thin-soled shoes, and, paying not the least attention to its swaying, walked across it until he reached her. Balancing himself with as much ease as though he was on solid ground, he stood beside her and watched the logs come down.

"I thought you told me you were no log driver," said the girl. "None of the boys would tackle this foot log without calks in their boots. Why, I even have calks in mine. Do you know, if you were to slip and fall, nothing could save you from being ground to pieces by those logs?"

"I'm not going to slip, though," said Pete. "I've ridden a steel girder up twenty-seven stories above Broadway. Can't wear calks on steel, you know; they'd slip."

Fern told her father about it that night when White Water Casey got back to the camp; but the big boss only grinned.

"Wait," he said, "until this new man sees what he's up against. Bet you he quits inside of a day."

"Bet you he doesn't," she shot back, "unless you make him."

"I ain't going to haze him none," said White Water in an injured tone, "I'm too short of men for that. If he makes halfway good at all, he can hold his job."

Heavy white frost was on the ground next morning, for it was early spring in the mountains. Pete Skyling shivered, as, one of five woolen-shirted log drivers, he strode up the cañon in the pale, cold dawn. On his shoulder was a peavey with a six-foot stock; he wondered just how he was intended to use it, for he had never handled one in his life.

The man walking beside Pete glanced down at the new boots of the green hand, and noted the long blue legs of the overalls he had purchased.

"If I was you," remarked the logger casually, "I'd stag them pants."

"Stag them?"

"Yep," said his friendly adviser, "cut the bottoms off of 'em, so's you won't catch your calks in 'em. I seen a feller drowned that a way once."

Wondering what it was all about, yet willing to concede his ignorance, Pete Skyling borrowed his new friend's clasp knife and cut the bottoms off his new overalls halfway between ankles and knees. He had to hurry to catch up with the others who showed no disposition to wait for him.

Rollway after rollway of logs they passed. Like great brownstone houses they stood piled on their skids above the foaming creek, waiting the arrival of the drivers who with the points of their peaveys would prize out the chocking blocks and send the entire rollway rumbling into the water. Already several men were working around the last rollway to come in sight. Even as Pete Skyling looked, the entire structure

melted into its integral parts, and, in a smother of foam, disappeared beneath the water; only to arise again and hurry onward, each log bunting the other in an effort to lead the way.

Easy work thought Pete; couldn't very well get drowned at that.

He changed his mind when at last he and the others halted a half mile above where he had seen the rollway "broken." For the man left in charge of the rear by White Water Casey indicated a half dozen logs which had hung up against a huge boulder in the center of the creek. Over logs and rock the water roared into a cloud of white spume.

"Little Willie," the straw boss, weighed two hundred and nine, wore a round-brimmed black hat cocked belligerently over one eye, smoked a corncob pipe with a two-inch stem, and didn't like green hands. Perhaps that is why he selected Pete Skyling for the job of helping to dislodge the stranded logs.

"You," he said shortly, "you in the new pants, can come 'long o' me an' 'Deermouse.' The rest of you boys can take this side of the creek."

Deermouse Brewster, the same young fellow who had advised Pete Skyling to stag his pants, winked at him on the sly.

"She's a moose!" he said, meaning that it was going to be pretty hard on a green hand, "but don't let Little Willie see you've got cold feet." Then to the utter astonishment of Pete Skyling he stepped into the icy water, born of a thousand snowdrifts far up in the high divides.

As Pete Skyling hesitated, the straw boss, standing up to his waist in the rushing white water, looked over his huge shoulder.

"Well," he yelled, "you in the new pants—what you waiting for? Come on in, the water's fine."

Pete Skyling looked up the creek and looked down the crek; here and there his companions were busily prizing stranded logs free, apparently indifferent to the chill of the water slapping around their legs; he alone was left on the shore hesitating. It was not that he was a coward; it was rather that it was all so unexpected, for not for an instant had he imagined that he would have to get wet; good and wet!

As the straw boss roared again everybody stopped work to watch the green hand as he stepped into water. It was so cold that it drove his breath out of his lungs in one great gasp.

Leaning heavily on his peavey to keep from being swept off his feet, foot by foot Pete Skyling fought his way across to Little Willie and Deermouse Brewster already heaving with the points of their peaveys at the stranded logs.

"Stick your point under that key log, you blamed fool," yelled Little Willie, setting the example as Pete Skyling floundered around. "Ah, there; now she hauls!" For the key log holding the others in place had moved an inch under the strength exerted by the three men.

"Once again," yelled the straw boss. "All together, boys, lift her outer there!" And exerting the whole of his huge strength Little Willie heaved so suddenly that as the key log gave way, Pete Skyling was thrown off his balance and disappeared in a swirl of foam.

The water was not more than three and a half feet deep, so he was in little danger of drowning. Gasping and choking he scrambled ashore dragging his peavey behind him, to be followed by a roar of laughter and encouraging yells.

"Watch him go!"

"He's headed for the tall timber."

"Oh, mother, tell me. Why did I ever leave home?"

Then suddenly as they had started to gibe, the slough pigs turned back to their work; for down through the

timber to the edge of the creek, with an open time book and a pencil in her hand came Fern Casey.

Shaking with cold, Pete Skyling watched the girl as she stood at the edge of the creek making entries in her time book. In view of her sociability the day before, he wondered that she did not seem to have noticed his presence.

"Pretty cold in the water this morning," he ventured. "I won't be a bit sorry when the sun comes up."

"It is chilly," she conceded frostily, "better be getting back to work before you freeze your feet."

There was not the least danger of frozen feet, and Pete Skyling knew it; but for the life of him he could think of no suitable repartee. Paying no more attention to him Fern leaped onto a drifting log and balancing herself perfectly, without the aid of a peavey, rode it down the creek forty or fifty yards, then sprang ashore and disappeared among the pines.

"Hey!" yelled Little Willie from across the creek. "What do you think this is? A movin'-picture show? Get over here an' give us a hand with this deadhead."

So Pete Skyling had to wade the creek again. With the others he was busy helping to roll out a grounded log, when happening to glance up, he saw the river boss himself, White Water Casey, standing on the shore a few feet away.

"Good morning," greeted Pete Skyling.

"Morn'" grunted White Water. Then, paying no more attention to the green hand, he addressed Little Willie.

"How are they rollin'?" he asked.

"Good enough," Little Willie replied huskily out of a corner of his big red mouth. "Water's droppin' fast, though."

"Don't I know it!" exclaimed White Water. "The niggerheads—boulders—are beginning to pop up everywhere along the creek. It's these dog-goned cold nights that's doin' it. Last two rollways we busted are hung up in a big jam fifty yards above where that foot log crosses the creek. Can't break no more rollways until we get the jam busted, and can't bust the jam till more water comes down."

"There's still lots of snow in the high hills," Little Willie pointed out. "Seems like these cold nights ought to let up before long; then there'll be all the water we need."

"Guess I'll have to lay off the main crew until the water comes down," said White Water. His gaze lingered a moment on Pete Skyling. "How's the new man making it, Willie?" he asked.

"Good enough," grunted the straw boss without hesitating. "Guess them new boots are hurtin' his feet some, but 'New Pants' will make a river hog yet."

"Right," snapped White Water. "Keep on bringing the rear down as far as you can, Willie. I'll need you and your men on the big dam when the water comes down."

Aching in every limb from the unaccustomed cold, Pete Skyling toiled beside Little Willie and Deermouse Brewster all that day. Seldom did either of his companions speak to him, and then only to tell him what to do. It was plain that they considered him an interloper who was usurping the place of a good man. Just why Little Willie should have commended his efforts to White Water Casey, Pete Skyling could not understand. He did not know that it was the code of the river men never to complain about one another. Yet in sheer justice to himself and Deermouse, Little Willie could have truthfully told White Water Casey that far from being of assistance to them, Pete Skyling's ignorance was such that most of the time he was only in the way. When at last night came, Pete Skyling limped behind the others on the way back to camp, utterly fagged out physi-

cally and hating himself for having sought work at an occupation with which he now knew he had no sympathy.

Following the example of the others he changed into his other clothes, hanging his wet things to dry upon the rack above the big heating stove. He had hardly finished when the supper bell rang.

Dusk was falling when he left the dining room and strolled down to the creek with an idea of taking a look at the big log jam above the bridge, of which White Water Casey had spoken.

Leaning on a peavey, the big boss himself was gazing at the great jam with a troubled look in his eyes. He raised his head at Pete Skyling's approach.

"She's a bad one," he said, nodding his head at the logs, piled thirty feet high above the waters of the rapidly falling creek. "Looks like we may have to use dynamite to bust her when the water comes down."

Pete Skyling had no opinion to offer, for he knew nothing at all about such things. But, as he gazed in amazement at the thousands of huge logs piled one upon the other and crisscrossed in every conceivable direction, the task of breaking the jam looked hopeless to him.

"I suppose," he said lamely, "it will take a lot of dynamite to do that."

White Water Casey puffed at his pipe thoughtfully. "See that big fellow right there in the center of the front of the jam?" he asked, indicating a log at least four feet in diameter, which seemed to be holding up tons. "Well, sir, I got a notion that that there baby is the key log of the whole works. If we can roll her out of there when the water comes down, most probably the jam will go out."

"It looks impossible to me," said Pete Skyling, "I don't see how it can be done."

"Probably not," muttered White Water Casey over his shoulder as he turned away, "but nothing ain't impossible to a river hog."

Pete Skyling did not reply, but across three thousand miles there came to him a picture of himself standing erect on an eight-inch steel girder which, at the end of a cable, was steadily rising to a height of twenty-seven stories above Broadway. For a moment the illusion was so great that he seemed actually to be looking down upon a sea of upturned faces below, that, as the girder ascended, gradually merged into one great, formless blur.

Blinking to get rid of the hallucination, he raised his eyes as a breath of warm air fanned his cheek. The wind had changed, and gray clouds that hinted of rain were gathering above the pines.

Next morning a drizzling rain was falling; it did not add to the comfort of the slough pigs as they heaved and rolled and lifted at the stranded logs which formed the rear of the main drive.

White Water Casey's remark was the consensus of opinion among the rivermen, when he came into the bunk house that night. For all day long it had rained steadily, increasing by night to a perfect deluge. Already the white waters of Clear Creek had turned yellow with mud.

"Hold yourselves ready to turn out at any time, boys," said the river boss; "water's coming down, and we've got to bust the jam."

It was still dark in the bunk house when the bull cook flung open the door; lantern in hand he stood framed in slanting spears of rain.

"Ro-oll ou-t!" he yelled. "Creek's up an' booming, an' Casey's yellin' his head off. Roll over, roll over; roll out, everybody. We're goin' to tickle the ribs of the big jam an' watch the logs go down."

"She'll be a moose!" remarked Little Willie as he shoved a huge foot into a water-soaked boot. "Bet you we don't break her before the water goes down."

"Bet you the boss' daughter will be there to see the jam go out," said Deermouse Brewster. "Fern Casey ain't the girl to miss a sight like that."

"She'd be on the jam itself," said another riverman, "if White Water would allow it. Bet you she'd have a peavey with her, too."

"Ain't no place for Fern on the jam," said Little Willie.

"Why not?" asked Pete Skyling.

" 'Cause it ain't," replied Little Willie ambiguously. "Ain't no place for you neither, unless you want to get squashed to a jelly."

"I guess I can take care of myself," said Pete Skyling stiffly.

"Maybe you can," said Little Willie, "and again maybe you can't. I've seen better men than you slip under at the breakin' of a jam."

The words of the big straw boss rang in Pete Skyling's ear with a sinister sound, when at last in the gray rainy dawn the crew stood at the edge of the creek; now a racing yellow flood upon the breast of which the stupendous log jam rose and fell, swayed and creaked and groaned beneath the push of the rising waters.

"Out on her boys," snapped White Water Casey, setting the example. "Down on the face of her and pry her teeth loose, and when she starts to break, get out of there as fast as you can."

Pete Skyling hesitated. It was the first time he had ever been called upon to walk on floating logs, and the great, swaying, creaking mass of timber seemed to hold possibilities of a sudden and horrible death, the thought of which appalled him.

"Watch your step, New Pants!" Little Willie's warning caused the green hand to shudder involuntarily, as once more he looked upon the big jam, from the face of which the drivers had already prized free a few logs, which were hurrying down the yellow flood. Like one fascinated, Pete Skyling watched the racing logs, and the big blobs of foam which escorted them. Farther and farther away floated the logs; then suddenly a girl's voice rang like a bell through the drizzling rain.

"There she goes! Now she hauls! Watch the logs go down!"

And like one man the river hogs ceased for an instant their prizing and rolling and heaving at the breast of the big jam. Like the voice of one man their roar crossed the fifty yards of yellow water which lay between the big jam, and a slender, yellow-haired girl, standing erect on the swaying foot log which formed the bridge.

"Get off that bridge, before the jam goes out!"

As though it had been awaiting a signal, the huge jam raised slightly, groaned and settled down again; while a few logs floated away from its great brown face.

"You," White Water Casey yelled at Pete Skyling still hesitating on the shore, "get down to the bridge as quickly as you can, and tell Fern to get off that log before the jam goes out."

Glad that he did not have to go out on the big jam, and hoping that it would "go out" before he got back, Pete Skyling ran along the edge of the creek shouting at the girl standing on the foot log; while on the log jam the river hogs stood waiting until Fern should have reached the shore; for well they knew that if the jam should yield to the steadily increasing pressure of the rising water behind it, the foot log would snap like a straw under the ponderous weight of the oncoming logs.

Standing on the big pine butt in the breast of the jam—the one that White Water Casey had designated as the key log—Little Willie balanced his two

hundred and nine pounds and yelled at the green hand running along the shore.

"Get a move on you, New Pants, she's going to go!"

Pete Skyling heard and glanced over his shoulder just in time to see a dozen logs break away from the breast of the big jam; then reached the bridge.

"Boss says to get off that bridge," he shouted at Fern. "He's afraid she'll go out."

Over her shoulder Fern Casey flashed him a coquettish glance, then, as a bunting and grinding noise came from the big jam fifty yards above the foot log, the girl's excitement overshadowed all thought of danger.

"I'm all right," she shouted. "Look at the jam, it's moving. Ah, watch the logs come down!"

Lifted by the might of the rising water the huge jam rose in a solid mass; then it dropped again leaving Little Willie still standing on the key log, hat cocked on one side of his great red head, little old corncob pipe struck in one corner of his mouth.

A few more logs dropped from the face of the jam and rushed downstream, as Pete Skyling ran out on the slippery wet foot log.

Standing erect on the bridge, Fern turned her head as it swayed under the running feet of Pete Skyling; then, just as he reached her, the bridge quivered violently under the impact of a floating log which had bunted into it at one end where it was almost level with the rising water. So entirely unexpected was the movement of the foot log, that the girl lost her balance and swayed precariously for an instant. Then, just as Pete Skyling caught hold of her dress, she pitched headlong off the bridge as a roar came from Little Willie.

"She's breaking, boys. There she goes! Watch the logs go down."

And with one hand gripping the dress of Fern Casey and the other arm and both legs wound around the foot log, Pete Skyling held the girl suspended above the roaring waters of Clear Creek and watched the racing logs come down.

He couldn't hold her long in that position and he knew it; and he couldn't raise her so that she might have clambered back onto the foot log. And she knew it, too.

"Drop me," she said quietly, "or both of us will go when the logs reach the bridge."

"Dashed if I do," stated Pete.

Then at what he saw he forgot himself entirely, for ahead of the great onrush of logs the big key log was bearing Little Willie downstream, with his round black hat cocked over one eye and his big yellow teeth splitting the stem of his corncob pipe. Bouncing, bunting and grinding against each other the logs pursued him as, erect on the floating key log, he sped toward the girl hanging at the end of Pete Skyling's arm.

"Drop her!" yelled Little Willie while he was still twenty feet from the bridge. "Drop her into my arms."

"It's my only chance," said Fern, trying to crane her face upward. "Let go!"

With a prayer in his heart Pete Skyling released his hold and she dropped like a plummet into the arms of Little Willie as, standing erect on the key-log in his steel-calked boots, he sped beneath the bridge.

Four feet in diameter and sixteen feet in length though it was the great log was forced beneath the yellow water as the giant river hog caught the slip of a girl in his huge arms. For a moment the men running along the shore held their breaths as Little Willie teetered and almost overbalanced, throwing out one dripping leg almost at right angles to his body. Then a cheer went up as he regained his equilibrium, and, with all his weight behind them, drove the steel calks deep into the great key log.

Still with his legs and arms wound around the foot log Pete Skyling held his breath as Little Willie rode beneath it with Fern Casey in his arms. The first dozen of the pursuing logs closed in around the man. Jumping from one to another in his calked shoes, with the girl in his arms he reached the shore just as the main body of the log jam gave way, and, scattering from shore to shore, rushed toward the foot log where Pete Skyling still clung.

"Get out of there you blamed fool," yelled White Water Casey, "the bridge is going out!"

He was too late; for with a crash the first of the big logs struck the bridge, almost jarring Pete Skyling from his hold; but still he clung. With unspeakable terror in his eyes he lay supine on the ten-inch foot log, watching the rush of the rough-barked horde.

Not even when the last of the logs had passed beneath the bridge did Pete Skyling move; then at last on hands and knees he "cooned it" along the foot log and fell in a heap on the shore. "You blamed young fool!" roared White Water Casey as with a huge hand he raised Pete Skyling to his feet. "What was you waiting for?"

"I was afraid I'd slip," said Pete Skyling sheepishly, "you see I was wearing my thin shoes. I loaned my new calked boots to Little Willie to break in, for they hurt my feet."

COMANCHE JACK PASSES ON

A PICTURESQUE figure of the old West was "Comanche Jack" Permansu, who died a few weeks ago at Lawton, Oklahoma, at the age of seventy-four. For a year prior to his death, the Indian chieftain and scout had been ill at the home of his daughter, Sara Pohacscut, near Fort Sill.

The parents of Comanche Jack were hostile Indians, living near the Arkansas River. They felt that the white men were robbing them of their country, and up to the age of twenty, young Comanche Jack shared this feeling toward the palefaces. When he attained man's estate, however, he realized that it would be to the benefit of his people to accept the white man's civilization, and accordingly, he entered the service of the United States government as a scout.

He took active part in the campaign against the Comanches, Cheyennes, and Arapahoes, and his work as a guide was extremely helpful to the soldiers. In the course of one of the engagements Comanche Jack was wounded in the back, and while lying on the battlefield, he was found by Quanah Parker, the Comanche chieftain. Quanah treated his wounds, in spite of the fact that he had turned against his own people, and helped him to get back to the white men's camp. As a result of this act of generosity, a deep-rooted friendship sprang up between the two Indians.

Comanche Jack was buried in the cemetery at Fort Sill, Oklahoma, with full military honors.

Bar Heart Bar

By Clem Yore

Author of "Sudden Slim," etc.

Synopsis of Preceding Chapters

JERRY KERRY, also known as Per Schedule, leaves his home in search of adventure. An ill-advised poker game strips him of everything but his horse. Then he fights a notoriously hard character known as Bad Jack Hatch. After this episode, he is hired by a beautiful young girl, Billie Lindell, who is the owner of the Bar Heart Bar Ranch. Billie has witnessed Jerry's bravery in the fight, so decides that he is the person who can best help her in the constant warfare that has existed between her ranch and the neighboring Circle H, which belongs to Bad Jack.

Jerry's first exploit is to carry Billie's pay roll from town out to her ranch, during which he has to get the best of five of Hatch's men.

Arrived at the ranch, Jerry makes friends with Bob Florrisant, the foreman, hears the history of the place—which includes buried gold, to secure which Hatch and Bloodhound Cortez, a vicious Mexican, are in league against the Bar Heart Bar—and begins to scout for information among the hills. One of Cortez's men leaves a note of warning for Billie, and for this act of infidelity is hanged by Cortez. Jerry finds the body, and secures from it a locket and rosary, as well as the information that the man's name was Lorenzo del Gado. A few days later, on a scouting expedition, he discovers one of Hatch's men spying on the Bar Heart Bar.

CHAPTER VI.

THE SPY.

JERRY watched this man, who was spying on the Bar Heart Bar, for more than an hour. Then he surveyed his surroundings. He could make it. He sure could. He could walk to the end of that deep cut in the hill, circle it, and be in a position either to catch the greaser spy or watch him as he left his post, if he were to leave his post.

At any event, the thing was worth a try. On he moved, after muzzling and tying up his pony, until he found a desirable spot beside a new trail, where fresh horse tracks clearly told of the path that the spy had used. Here Jerry waited. Five o'clock came. A sound of hoofbeats arose from the far end

of the gulch. A man's bobbing head appeared amid the trees. Jerry shook out a little loop and arranged his lass-rope to his liking. Along came the figure among the pines, as a song arose on the air.

Then came the singer. He was a good-looking lad, with great black eyes, long jet-black hair, a chiseled nose, and well-formed mouth, which gave to his appearance a feminine aspect.

He was passing the place back of which Jerry crouched, when Per Schedule flung his rope in a dexterous side twist, and settled its loop about the man's breast, pinning his arms and jerking him flat to the earth. The collision with the ground stunned the youth. When he came to, he stared into Jerry Kerry's eyes. Then his swarthy face blanched, and a miserable twitching of fear assailed his lips.

"What would you do?" he cried in Spanish.

"A slit throat makes for silence, eh? Is it not written so in your books?" Jerry asked.

"No, not that. I was doing nothing," the youth replied.

"You were watching the ranch of a girl. How about those glasses on your hip?" Jerry demanded.

"True, I was watching. But give me a chance. Just a chance for my life. I am very young, only a *pobrecito,* whose old mother is filled with woe. There was no other way, and so, because I could ride a horse, El Sabueso made me join him. I swear that I did not want to come."

His cowardice was a pitiful vision. Jerry hit upon a sudden and inspirational resolve. He'd send this youth back to the Bloodhound and to Bad Jack Hatch. Perhaps, by doing this, he could frighten the Bloodhound into returning to Mexico. That is if——

"Get up," he ordered, "and mount that bronc. Throw your gun down and don't look this way."

The youth obeyed.

"What is your name?" asked Jerry.

"They call me *El Escolar.* I write poems. I am out of school of the Priests of San Antina but five months," the boy answered.

"Your name, fool! Don't jest with me. If you are the scholar to your blood-letting pals, you are not to your priests. Tell me your name!" Jerry demanded.

"I am Carlos Del Gado, the son of Catalina Del Gado, who was the wife of Hermano Del Gado, a great man of Mexico until death claimed him and left us paupers."

Del Gado! The name struck like a rocket in the brain of Jerry Kerry. He smiled, and the look of a fiend was in that grimace. "Look at me," he ordered. Carlos swung about his face.

"You mean to murder me," he squealed. "I can see it in your eyes. Don't you believe me? I am of honest people, the Del Gado family has ever been an honest one. I, alone, was ever connected with evil. And it is only now, because of the brutal treatment of the Bloodhound to my mother and to me that I have done wrong."

"Where is your mother?" Jerry asked.

"Over there." He swept the air with an outflung arm.

"At the Circle H?" Jerry continued the questioning.

"Yes, at the Circle H. She, too, does the bidding of Cortez and Hatch. Those twin devils have put fear in her soul. Every day they say that they will kill me. And this threat makes her do what they want," the boy informed Jerry.

"Had you a brother or a cousin by the name of Lorenzo?"

"Yes. He lives at——" The boy's eyes went wide. He ceased to speak. Clearly he did not wish to tell where his brother lived. "I refuse to tell," he said grimly. "But he is my brother."

Jerry's hand dropped into a pocket and came out dangling a string of golden beads. These made the large eyes of Carlos pop with fright. His lips flecked in a nervous tension, his throat throbbed, and then he screamed, "What have you done to Lorenzo? What devil's play has brought his rosary into your hands?"

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed Per Schedule. "You are all tarred with the same stick, eh? Mother and sons do the dirty work of dogs. Get you back to El Sabueso Cortez and tell him that what has already been done to your brother Lorenzo I intend to do to him. Tell him that I know what he is up to, and that these hills have men with rifles in their hands back of their trees. Every day that he stays in America he is twenty-four hours nearer the little knot at the end of a seven-foot rope. Tell him just that. Wait, hombre. I'll tie you up so that that horse won't bounce you off."

He used the boy's own rope to lash his hands and arms and tie his feet together beneath the body of the horse. Then, as a swift suggestion filled his mind, he dropped the string of gold beads into a top pocket of Carlos' coat and slapped the horse on the hip. Carlos moved down the trail and vanished amid the trees. Jerry returned to Rambling Red, mounted, and hurried to the cave.

Just as the sun went down, he saw a lone horse walking slowly toward the Circle H. The figure on its back sat humped over, head down, the abject and miserable image of a crushed man. Jerry felt a sudden lump rise in his throat.

"Maybe I did him dirt," he mused. "He sure looks as if he had told me the truth. Otherwise, he'd be kicking the ribs out of that horse trying to get to the Bloodhound to carry this news."

He removed the saddle from Rambling Red, fed him from a nosebag, and then made a bed of boughs near the opening to the cave. Soon the moon and stars came out, and the wizardry of a desert night cast its spell upon the land. Far away the lights of the Circle H glowed like flecks of fire. Jerry dropped to his side and slept.

CHAPTER VII.

RAWHIDE AND RED-HOT IRON.

EL SABUESO CORTEZ sat in the large room of Hatch's house. And about him ranged as excellent a crew of bad men as ever followed crime as labor. Bad Jack Hatch lolled in a chair before a fire of mesquite, his face still showing the yellow marks of Jerry Kerry's knuckles. And clustered in semicircle formation along his side of the room, sat Corkscrew Kelly, Paducah, Uncompaghre Johnnie, Bat Scully and Biloxi. These, with other Circle H American hands, seemed to choose positions apart from Cortez and some twenty of his men.

The house was of giant size, and built like a jail. Its very atmosphere suggested confinement and torture, while its inhabitants were fit to grace its inner sides. Distrust was everywhere. One could see it, feel it, sense it. No man trusted another. Every man there was some other man's meat, should the right moment arise. They were aristocrats of the double cross.

Cortez wore a black mask of passion, out of which gleamed his white teeth from behind a smile that was etching his black mustaches into stringy, horse-hair streaks of grim color.

A sound from the night outside crashed into the room.

"Carlos is come home," said Hatch. "It's about his time."

"Go out, one of you men and bring him in," Cortez said, glancing toward the section where his gilded ones sat. "You, Fierro, jump! Bring in that milk sop. I want some fun." He

chuckled in his throat, and the evil fairly sparkled through the air. Fierro leaped to his feet and rushed from the room. In a moment, he returned half carrying the boy Carlos whose hands were as yet tied back of him. Fierro shoved the youth into the circle of hardened and quizzical faces after untying his hands.

"What now," squeaked Cortez. "Why that rope?"

"There was a man who lassooed me as I was coming home from my watch with the glasses. He it was who tied me up and sent me to you," the boy replied.

"Man? What kind of a man?" demanded Cortez.

"He was tall, strong as a bull, lithe as a lizard, and over his head waved a mass of curly red hair. It was like gold. His deep blue-gray eyes looked through and through you. He said to tell you——"

"Go on, never mind his eyes, what did he say?" Cortez interrupted.

"He said that he intended to do to you what has already been done to my brother Lorenzo, and that back of the trees on the range many men are waiting for you with rifles in their hands. Every day that you stay in America you are twenty-four hours nearer the little knot at the end of a seven-foot rope."

Carlos stopped abruptly. He had caught something wicked and secretive glowing in the deep centers of the Bloodhound's eyes. He backed away a bit. His hands clenched and his throat throbbed, as his eyes went wide, and his face twitched with fear.

"And you remembered all that, eh? What else did he do? And what was his name?" Cortez asked.

Bad Jack had been watching the boy. At Cortez's query he said, in a tone that carried like a scraping file into every cranny of the room, "It was Per Schedule Kerry. If he's all set, then I reckon that we've got some cutting-out to do among this gang of baby killers that you've brought across to crimp them Bar Heart Bar hands."

"What else did he do?" snapped Cortez paying no heed to the sarcastic note in Hatch's words.

"He gave me this," said the boy. "This rosary and crucifix belonged to my brother Lorenzo. They have hung him, Señor Cortez."

"Give it to me," the man demanded.

Carlos dropped the golden emblem into the Bloodhound's hands. Cortez grinned broadly into the faces of his men.

"On my word it is gold," he smirked. "Good yellow gold that the Del Gados paid hard money for."

For a while he stared into the eyes of Carlos. Then he leaned toward one of his men. "Get me my primer," he said. Several of the men guffawed as they heard the term. The man whom Cortez had addressed arose and took a long quirt from a pile of tackle in a corner of the room. This he gave to the Bloodhound. The eyes of Carlos were now like those of a fear-stricken child.

"You told him where Lorenzo had been living, eh?" spoke the soft, insinuating voice of Cortez.

"No, on my mother's honor, no. He asked me, but I would not tell." The boy's answer was like a cry.

"You told him that I had given Lorenzo a good job and an easy one, eh? You told him this, perhaps?" Cortez suggested.

"No. I told him nothing. I knew what you would do," the boy said.

Cortez arose to his feet and, with one hand, motioned to three of his men back of Carlos. These jumped and grasped the boy's arms and body.

"Pull off his shirt, the room is too warm," Cortez commanded.

Carlos was, indeed, perspiring. Great beads were forming on his forehead. But he said no word, made no

sound. All faces in the room were fixed on the countenance of the boy. It was as though the men relished the sight that they were about to behold. They appeared like highly strung spectators watching an exciting contest. Biloxi, however, was clearly distressed. He dropped his eyes, his foot scraped along the floor, his gunhand loosened his .45.

Swift fingers jerked the clothes from the boy's form and, in a twinkling, he was standing naked to the waist.

"A little iron with rawhide, my dearest ones, a little iron to warm the touch," Cortez remarked.

Fierro shoved a poker into the fire. Biloxi sprang to his feet. "None of that, Cortez," he yelled, "none of that as long as I am in this room."

"The moon is up, my friend," snarled Cortez, "and the mocking birds will sing their night song soon. Why not stroll outside?"

"You devil, what do you intend to do?" asked Biloxi.

"Probe this scholar's mind and memory. If he has told that Kerry, where we have what the Bar Heart Bar wants, then I want to know it. If he has told this, then there will be hornets flying soon at our faces. Sit down, my friend, I shall soon know," Cortez continued.

He swung about and assumed a tense posture. In his hand hung the long five-lashed Mexican quirt. Every eye took in the diabolism of that pose; every ear was attuned for the first swish and its echoing cry of agony. Bad Jack Hatch's face split with a wicked smirk. The air was drenched with evil, was prickled with some odious and hideous portent. Then fell the whip.

It cut through the room like the whir of a snake. It bit across the shoulders of the boy and left an ugly seam of dull and purple crimson in its wake.

"You told him our secret, didn't you?" queried Cortez as he laughed a soft, faint chuckle. "You told him of Lorenzo, is it not so?"

"No, no, a thousand times no!" came the cry.

Down came the quirt again.

Then the door was flung wide open, and an old woman stood in its opening. She gaped at the sight that she saw, then fled toward Carlos who was even then about to swoon. But rough hands flung her against the wall. There she stared and listened, as she saw the quirt raise and lower as it whipped its length about the bare body of the boy.

"Quick!" cried one of the men holding Carlos. "He's caving in like a mud house. Give him the iron now. Later, he will not feel it."

Cortez jerked the hot iron from the glowing coals. Then, yanking up the face of the fainting boy, he yelled, "It's your last chance. Didn't you tell him what enterprise Lorenzo was on?"

The boy's eyes sought his mother's face.

"You know that I do not lie," he moaned. "Tell them that I have nothing to say."

Catalina Del Gado leaped toward Cortez.

"Don't do this thing," she wailed. "My son speaks the truth. He would not tell a living soul what business it is that you have set Lorenzo upon—any more than I would speak of the work that I do for this devil's gang. Don't, Señor Cortez, don't mar the face of my boy."

Down dropped the white-hot iron. There was a scream, a puff of smoke. And, after this, the odor of burnt flesh stifled the nostrils with a pungent smell. A red welt appeared across the nose and left cheek of Carlos. His captors released their holds, and he dropped on the floor like a sack of wheat. His mother fell at his side and, taking his head in her withered arms,

crooned to the senseless youth just the same as she would have sung to a babe.

"Señora," said Cortez, "do you know to whom these beads belong?"

The old woman raised her tearless face. Then her eyes grew wide. She dropped Carlos and reached for the rosary. "Those were given to Lorenzo by the good Fransisco Lupe. Where did you get them?" she asked.

"A gringo called Per Schedule Jerry Kerry hung your Lorenzo like a dog to a mesquite tree and robbed him of the rosary. Then this Carlos went asleep at his post and Per Schedule wrapped him up on his horse, gave him these beads, and sent him to me with insulting threats. I did but try to make your son admit that he had told this hound what it was that Lorenzo was doing for me. He would not. That proves that your boy told the truth. I am sorry. To-morrow, or within a short while, I will send him home with you and will give you gold to jingle in your pocket."

"But what was Lorenzo doing up here?" the woman asked.

"I sent for him. On the way he was captured by this Jerry Kerry and was hung," Cortez said, winking at Fierro.

"Take that to sleep with you," said Biloxi suddenly.

His fist crashed against the Bloodhound's chin and the Mexican fell senseless against a corner of the fireplace.

His men reached for their guns, but Biloxi's rifle was wavering from body to body in such manner that all hands fell back to their sides. Then Bad Jack Hatch spoke.

"Now you've done it," he said. "You have done it, plumb. There'll be trouble among the yearlings for us two outfits from this time on."

"Let it come," said Biloxi. "I just lost my head, and that's all there is to it."

Cortez opened his eyes, raised on an elbow, and sat up.

"For that, my friend," he said to Biloxi, "I shall tickle you with my knife."

"When?" Biloxi asked.

"Not until I have shown you the way to get rich. Never fear, my friend, I shall not allow this rupture to break up our business. As soon as some more of my golden ones come over from Mexico, I shall lead you to the richest harvest of your lives. Think of it, chests and bags of old and yellow gold. More than all of us can carry. After that, Biloxi, my knife for you."

Biloxi spat into the fire, missing the face of Cortez only by a fraction of an inch. Then he turned to Catalina. "Come on," he said. "Go prepare a bed for your son. I'll fetch him to you."

He swung the limp, unconscious form of the boy across his shoulders and followed the old woman from the room.

As the door closed after him Cortez spoke to Bad Jack Hatch.

"To-morrow we must comb the hills for this Jerry Kerry. And when we have him, I want to slit his throat at the same ceremony in which I kill Biloxi."

"Biloxi's all right," said Hatch. "But you have to handle him with gloves. It's a soft streak in him, at times. I'll have him tell you that he's sorry, in the morning."

"Ever since Per Schedule made a monkey out of us in that Deep River Gulch, Biloxi has been brooding. My guess is that the best way is to kill him before he goes wrong and gets us all hung. He's trying to turn square," Johnnie remarked.

"Who'll take the job?" asked Bad Jack.

"I will," replied Uncompaghre Johnnie.

Bat Scully's eyes narrowed to slits of gray fire, and they played across Johnnie's face like streaks of hate.

CHAPTER VIII.

JERRY FALLS A VICTIM.

JERRY KERRY felt restless all the night long. Twice he lifted himself on an elbow and stared out of the cave across the desert, to where the ruby gleams of light told of the habitation of Bad Jack Hatch. At dawn he was up, and scarcely had he fed his horse and partaken of a light lunch himself, than he heard a horse coming toward him. He ran to the entrance just in time to greet Billie, who had dismounted on the run.

"Oh!" she said, then clutched his arm.

"What is it?" he asked, for she seemed worried.

"I don't know. I thought that you were in trouble. I don't ever know how these promptings come to me, but they come. I always obey them. Last night I fancied that you were in danger. I lay down to sleep and that sensation continued. At ten thirty I arose, saddled my pony, told Maria where I was going and got away about eleven. I brought you some food and some for Rambling Red. Has any thing happened?" she asked.

"Not a thing. But, Miss Billie, I felt all night exactly like you say that you felt. I think that something has popped over yonder," said he, pointing toward the Circle H. "They had a bright light going all night. We can sure be on the prod for real trouble, from this time right on. Look yonder."

Four bands of horsemen were issuing from Hatch's place in four different directions. Jerry counted the riders. There were, as nearly as he could estimate, twenty men. For some time, the boy and girl watched them. Two bands headed to the right of the cave and two to the left.

"Uh-huh," remarked Per Schedule, "They're combing the brush for me. Twenty men, eh? That means twenty of the best trackers and trailers. How I wish that I had Bob Florrisant and some of your best boys with me. I sure would romp over to the Circle H just to see what was going on over there."

"Gracious, Jerry, you make my blood run cold! Would you try to enter those ranch buildings?" Billie asked.

"When the cat's away, you know," Jerry lightly remarked.

"It would be sheer suicide," exclaimed Billie.

"You were speaking of hunches a while ago, weren't you?"

"Yes, why?"

"My hunch is that all the men that are worth anything are on the move after me. Oh! I forgot. I had a visit from Carlos Del Gado yesterday——" and he forthwith launched into a narrative of his adventure with the Mexican boy.

"And you gave him the rosary?" asked Billie as he finished.

"You bet! That was my trump card. I figured that that would convince Cortez that I had told the boy the truth and that he would give up his plans and go back across the border. There's a bunch of those riders within two miles of us. I wonder if I can make 'em out with my glasses?" he added.

"Yes," he said presently as he stared through the glasses. "There's Kelly, Paducah, Uncompaghre Johnnie, Bat Scully, Bad Jack and some other Americans. There's a Mexican, too."

"That Mexican beside Hatch is Cortez. I know him from what I've been told of his appearance. I believe that they're heading this way. Let's go, Jerry!" Billie exclaimed.

"You're just as safe here as you would be anywhere. Anyhow, what

kind of lookout would I have if I left my post, when the first chance I got to take a squint came to me? Now's our great opportunity to deal deuces to this gang. Give me the glasses."

Billie gave the binoculars to Per Schedule, who swung them directly on the front of the advancing column of horsemen.

"They're splitting," he said, after a long scrutiny. "Two's coming this way. There's a third fellow. And he's trailing the other two. That's Biloxi in front, Uncompaghre is beside him, and the third one is Bat Scully. They're three of the five I disarmed in Deep River Gulch. I wonder what's up with them."

"Where are the others?" Billie asked.

"They swung on over the hump and have ridden parallel to the old trail. These three are coming right down this ridge. Are our horses all right?"

"Let's go see," Billie suggested.

Billie and Jerry muzzled their ponies, then went in front of them, and saw that they were indiscernible. They hurried back of the entrance boulder and waited. Soon the crunching sound of walking horses was heard and then a cry. It was more like a hail than a cry, and it carried an insistent, a dominant note in its body. The horses stopped. A voice made answer. Then came another cry. After this the light sound of an approaching horse rang through the trees.

"Hi, Bat! What's up?" snapped a voice.

"Biloxi, that skunk Uncompaghre, you're riding with, is heading you along this ridge to pot shoot you."

"You're a liar!" came from Uncompaghre Johnnie.

"You know that I ain't a liar. Last night, Biloxi, after you carried out that kid, Johnnie said that he'd get you. He said that you was turning yellow and had been ever since you and the rest of us was corraled by Per Schedule in the gulch. Bad Jack and El Sabueso agreed that Johnnie should get you."

"Can you see?" whispered Billie.

"Yes, stand right here, and you can get a good look at them. That's Uncompaghre Johnnie, riding the big blue. The fellow raking him with that sour look is Biloxi, and the other is Bat Scully. What a sight!"

"Did you agree to that, Johnnie?" asked Biloxi.

"No, he lies. Why——"

"Ride on ahead of me! You dirty tarantula, I can see by your eyes that Bat don't lie," Biloxi remarked.

"And you can see something else, can't you?" sneered Johnnie.

"Meaning which?"

"That you're done with us boys, right now, and was since last night," Johnnie asserted.

Biloxi laughed.

"Done? Say, you don't know me. I'll be romping these sands with Bad Jack when you're polluting the roots of daisies."

Billie suddenly screamed, and her cry set the pines tingling with echoes.

Jerry Kerry had stepped from behind his covert so quickly that the girl hadn't noticed his act, until she saw him level his rifle at the trio standing some seventy-five feet away.

"Hands up!" she heard him shout.

The cry rang through the trees like a deadly menace. Six hands went immediately into the air. Biloxi swung about and, as he saw Per Schedule, he smiled. "Good morning, cowboy," he laughed, "if you ain't got a pat name I don't know."

"What are you going to do, Jerry?" asked Billie.

"Wrap up these birds and deliver them to Bob. He'll sure be mighty happy to take a squint at them," Jerry remarked.

Uncompaghre and Bat were visibly nettled. They showed the unmistakable

signs of fear in their faces, and watched the boy and the girl out of eyes that resembled those of a wounded hawk held at bay. Biloxi alone evinced no fear.

"You slide over and remove their hardware, Billie," ordered Jerry. The girl ran swiftly to each of the outlaws, threw away their guns, examined saddlebags, and then stood off as she said, "They are disarmed."

"Now you get on your pony and fan these trees for home," said Jerry. "And when you get there send Bob and as many of the boys as he can spare this way. I'll stay and keep these birds company. They might get lonesome."

"I don't like that," said Billie. "I ought to stay with you."

"You get on back as soon as you can," Jerry ordered.

"No, we'll both take them home. I can ride ahead and give you warning if I see their friends," Billie said persuasively.

"That's the slow way, Billie. Anyhow, with Bob coming this way, it should throw confusion into the other fellows that are scouting around these hills. They won't carry no fight, if Bob brings about fifteen or twenty men," Jerry told her.

Biloxi was watching Jerry's eyes. And somehow he sent an intangible message to the mind of Per Schedule. Jerry felt from that look as though Biloxi had offered encouragement to him. His heart went out for this man who, but a moment before, he felt, was on the chill edge of assassination. What was it that Biloxi wanted to convey to him? He mentally flashed understanding to the outlaw, lingered with his eyes on the man's face, and then turned to Billie who had approached him.

"You're not afraid to go, are you?" he asked.

"No!" she answered, a great light welling in her eyes, "but I do fear for you. It seems that I am never to see you again. That if I leave you now that it will be for some bitter experience. Please come home with me, Jerry, please do!"

A flood of emotion rushed through Jerry. He wanted to look at her, but felt that he must keep his vision fixed on his prisoners. All that he could do was to stammer some involuntary remark, which he could not afterward remember. Then he heard her murmuring words close beside his shoulder. She had turned her back to the outlaws and now stood beside Jerry, so close that her body brushed his. Her head was lowered, her hands clenched in some outburst of emotion. Her voice was almost inaudible, as she murmured:

"Don't you recall Maria's dream about the blackbirds?"

"Uh-huh, but I'm wearing the dead man's things," replied Jerry.

"I don't want to leave you. Jerry, I can't leave you. You don't know what I mean, but I simply can't. I don't care. This feeling is larger than my endurance. I can't go and leave you like this. I just know that it is wrong," the girl said.

"All right, little partner," he said jocularly, though his very heart was in his throat and pounding with the excitation caused by that close communion with the girl's mood. "All right, you get the horses and we'll start on right now."

Billie gave vent to an involuntary gasp of delight. Biloxi's eyes showed that he was pleased and that he wanted to speak. Jerry decided that he would tie up the men and, in the action, he would somehow find opportunity to converse with Biloxi. He gave his rifle to Billie, when she came with the horses. And, while he lashed back the arms of Bat Scully and Uncompaghre Johnnie, the girl kept them covered with the carbine.

"I want to throw in with you fellows," whispered Biloxi as Jerry was roping him. "I've got a whole earful to tell you."

"All right," murmured Jerry. "You won't lose anything by it."

Over the spur there rang the faint bark of a gun. The three prisoners jerked erect. Billie stared into Jerry's face out of frightened eyes, then she snapped her lips and looked away.

"Let's get going!" ordered Jerry. "Billie, you take the lead; and you, Johnnie, don't try any tricks, or I'll let the breeze blow through you. Step out now and keep kicking them bronchos. The first man that makes a bobble, or tries to run a whizzer on me, I'll kill before he gets a running start."

Billie started ahead. Jerry mounted Rambling Red. The outlaws filed back of the girl and, as her pony began to trot, their horses followed suit. Not a word was spoken. Not a sign was made by any of the men to indicate anything other than profound respect for the gun Jerry carried so carelessly across his saddle. A mile went by, then another.

Of a sudden, a long line of horsemen could be seen topping the bare rise of a hill about a half mile to the right.

"They're my boys," cried Billie. "That's Old Bob Florrisant in the lead. I know him from the way that he rides."

"What are they after?" asked Jerry.

"They're chasing somebody," Billie reported.

"Can you see who it is?"

"No."

The instant was tense. They were now passing through a scant fringe of the forest, before which lay the withered east side of the range and, beyond this, the gray mesas, gaunt gashes of arroyos, swales and gulches. Everywhere loomed the ghastly images and suggestions of the prickly pear, cacti and mesquite. A turkey flew up, headed for a distant ridge, swerved, almost before it got under way, banked its wings, and set a course at right angles from the one that it had been pursuing. This revealed something to Jerry. He raised his voice in a shout.

"Stick your spurs to that pony, Billie, and head him for the top of this spur. Never mind the boys. You make for home!"

"Aren't you coming with me?" she called.

"I can't. Didn't you see that turkey?"

"Yes," she shouted, staring back from the head of the line. "But do you think——" she began.

A rifle boomed from the thicket over which the fowl had just flown. A bullet whined through the air above Jerry's head. "There's your answer," he cried. "Get going, and don't stop until you are safe! Never mind me, I'm all right."

"I'm not going," Billie declared.

"*Go,* I tell you! Each second is precious. Do you want this bunch to hop on the Bar Heart Bar, when it's without its men? Do you want El Sabueso to cut the throats of Maria and all the rest?"

This was enough. The suggestion of what Cortez and Hatch might do, combined with the indisputable ring of authority in Jerry's voice and the drawn and tense aspect of his face and mouth cast all hesitancy from the girl's mind. She spurred her pony and went forward up the ridge. In a moment, she was lost amid the high trees of the upper level of the rim.

"Now where?" sneered Uncompaghre Johnnie, twisting about his head. Jerry trotted forward using the horses and bodies of his captives as a screen from the riflemen hid in the thickets below and before him.

"We're going back," he said, turning Johnnie's horse into the shelter of the brush. The ponies of Bat Scully and

Biloxi trailed Rambling Red. Biloxi, superb horseman that he was, knee-guided his mount into such a position that it kept Johnnie's and Bat's horses on the quick step and in direct line with Jerry who was riding, face to rear, and watching the sides of the hill. The horses swung about in a wide circle trying to reach the top of the spur, where Per Schedule hoped that he might find the safety of the cave as a haven against assault. And as he rode, always staring at his back trail, Rambling Red edged beside a deep ravine, whose sheer walls fell away from a narrow and loose trail.

Of a sudden, the cry of Biloxi reached his ears. And the next moment he was being hurled headlong to the bottom of the ravine. For an instant only, he was conscious of trying to throw himself from his saddle. Then he was mixed with the body and legs of his pony. Rambling Red had stepped on a soft spot in the trail and, as it gave beneath his hoofs, he toppled and fell sidewise down the bank.

Long before horse and rider had floundered to the bottom of the draw, Per Schedule's head had struck a rock, which knocked him senseless. Uncompaghre Johnnie emitted a loud scream. A cry it was of exaltation and alarm. It rang far over the treetops, and was answered from below by two distinct voices. Then Johnnie leaped from the saddle. He fell against a sharp outcrop of slabrock and, with a few rapid scraping movements, severed the rope that bound his hands. Then he released Bat Scully.

"What'll it be, Biloxi?" sneered Johnnie. "Do you throw in with us or take yours with him?"

"Cut these ropes! I'm just as dumb as a mink. That was a narrow escape. You get down there and tie up that fellow, Bat." Biloxi's words and his rapid manner of excited speech instantly disabused the mind of Uncompaghre Johnnie of any suspicion. He immediately cut Biloxi's thongs.

In a few moments, after Bat had secured Jerry's guns and recovered Rambling Red, Per Schedule revived and stared about him.

"How things have changed," he laughed. "Sort of looks like somebody dealt me plumb deuces. Lead your ace! Which way is it?"

"Crawl on that bronc of yours!" commanded Bat, "and head him back to the trail."

Jerry painfully climbed into his saddle. His head was reeling, there was a pain in his right side, and his leg was burning from a number of abrasions. Yet he managed to cast a rapid eye around the horizon and was delighted to see the trim body of Billie, standing high in her stirrups, riding her pony frantically along the rim of the hill, where he had last seen Bob Florrisant and his men. In a brief time, Per Schedule was tied and was being escorted to the top of the spur. Arriving there, he stared into the faces of Bad Jack Hatch and Bloodhound Cortez.

After a rapid narrative of their adventures, Biloxi, Bat and Johnnie mixed with the other members of the gang. And, as Kelly threw a lead line over Rambling Red's head, all of the men swung slowly down the ridge and descended to the flat of the desert.

An hour went by. The outlaws moved through the hideous vegetation without speech and with a minimum of speed, as though all the time in the world lay at their disposal. Occasionally Cortez swung about and stared sneeringly into Jerry's eyes.

As they issued from the thickets of the wasteland, a sudden sight before them caused Cortez to cry in a loud exultant voice. "See, *compañeros!* See that cloud of dust coming this way? This is the dust kicked up by the fast feet of my golden ones. My brave boys have, at last, arrived. Now you'll

see some fun. You think us children, eh, Hatch? Wait till you cast an eye on those men ahead. Biloxi, how do you feel now?"

"Sure ain't beginning to shake none at what you promise to do. But there's one thing I want to know right here and now. Listen, Jack Hatch, and you, too, Cortez. Did you fellows set Johnnie on me this morning?" Biloxi demanded.

Hatch looked at Cortez, then swung his eyes on the faces of Bat and Uncompaghre. What he saw there made him arrive at a swift decision. Biloxi's hand was on his gun. This he had picked up from the earth, where Billie had thrown it, as he returned to the top of the spur with Jerry. His eyes were mere slits, his nostrils white rings, and a smile of vicious savagery gleamed in front of his exposed and snaglike teeth. Bad Jack didn't like the face of Biloxi. It seemed as though death weren't really very far away from that visage.

"I sure did," he said. "I thought that you was wanting to turn crooked, right now. And the reason that I done it was to keep a lot of us from doing a hoedown on the air. But I see that you've had a change of heart. Ain't I right?"

"I'm trailing along with you, until this next trick is all turned. Then I'm shoving on, somewheres," said Biloxi. "But before I go I want just one chance to manhandle both Cortez and Johnnie. I want that chance to fight 'em both with my hands. No guns, no knife—nothing but bone and gristle, feet and teeth. Do I get it, fellows?" he swung his gaze around the circle of Americans who were riding with him. Some of the men silently nodded.

"How about it, Cortez?" queried Jack.

"Pooh!" snarled Cortez. "Let it be to-night."

"Suits me, too," added Uncompaghre. "I'll eat him up."

"To-night she is," remarked Bad Jack Hatch. "It's better that way than having you fellows gnaw and claw at each other, when we get into business."

"I'm riding ahead to meet my boys," yelled El Sabueso, darting away with Fierro and three other Mexicans at his heels.

Jerry Kerry caught Biloxi's face. And once more he saw the deep and moving suggestion of a message or some lingering intelligence trying for expression in the glowing centers of the man's eyes. Jerry answered with a like look and hung his head.

When the Circle H was reached, Per Schedule was thoroughly searched, his pockets rifled, his boots removed, his hat lining turned inside out.

"Don't you let a fellow keep his makings?" he asked of Bad Jack Hatch.

"Smoke, if that'll do you any good," snarled Hatch, throwing his tobacco and papers beside him. "That sack will last you as long as you'll be needing it." Then he ordered his men out of the room, where Jerry had been placed, closed, and latched the door.

In a few moments, Hatch and Cortez entered the room, accompanied by Catalina Del Gado. The old woman stared into Jerry's eyes with a look of hatred.

"This is the man, señora," said Cortez, "who hung your boy up by the neck. See that tobacco pouch? Whose is that?"

The old woman lowered her gaze until it fell upon the leather tobacco container, which Jerry had removed from Lorenzo Del Gado's clothes.

"It is my boy's! My poor murdered boy's!" she exclaimed, picking up the pouch, which she was about to insert into a fold of her bosom when Cortez hissed into her ear.

"You will pardon me for what I did to your other son last night, señora, won't you? I did it because I thought

that Carlos had betrayed us. I wanted to know. We could have killed this man Jerry Kerry where we found him, but it is the law of our people that vengeance belongs to those who have been wronged. I give him to you now. I give him to you and to Carlos."

"Gracias, señor! Gracias! If I may but see this beast begging on his knees, then I shall be happy. If I may but see my other son avenge the murder of my proud Lorenzo, then I shall die in peace. When, señor, when?" the old woman asked.

"To-night, señora. To-night, in the big room of the ranch house before all the men of my band," Cortez promised her.

Hatch and Cortez tied Jerry's hands and feet, and fastened him to a ring bolt in the wall. Then they walked outside, where Cortez gave orders to the two men guarding the cabin to permit old Catalina to come and go as she willed. And, while they stood a few feet from the door, the old woman strode to Jerry Kerry, lifted his chin with a hand, and slapped his face with a withered palm. He smiled back into her eyes.

Of a sudden a numbing sweep of thought possessed him.

He thought of the relics that he had taken from the dead man—these Cortez had not found. He tried to speak but words failed him; his throat had closed under the overwhelming impetus of his surging mind. But, as the old hag struck him a second time, he regained his composure and said in a low, swift sentence of Spanish, "Come back, Señora Del Gado, after you have shaken off those two devils. I have a note from your dead son. I have proof that I did not hang him. These men try to blind your eyes."

Catalina crossed herself, and lowered her mouth until it came on a level with Jerry's ear.

"You speak the truth?" she hissed.

"Yes, there are a locket and other things. Written things," replied Jerry in a whisper that ended almost on the tip of his tongue.

"Ha! ha! ha! ha!" laughed Cortez, "Catalina is enjoying herself, eh?"

There sounded a loud smack from within the cabin.

Bad Jack's jeering mirth came back into the room as Catalina hurried outside. She closed the door and, turning to Cortez, said, *"Gracias, senor,* now my Carlos shall be healed quickly." Then she shambled away toward a squat mud-baked hut, where her younger son lay on a bed of racking agony.

Down at the stables, a group of Americans were admiring Rambling Red. Biloxi rubbed down the pony, put it in a stall, and hung Jerry's rigging beside it.

When Biloxi left the barn, Rambling Red set up a loud and constant neighing. That high strident voice rang throughout the group of buildings like the wail of a lost child.

Jerry Kerry pursed his lips, at its sound, and sent a shrill whistle into the air.

Rambling Red neighed and pawed at the earth in his stall, and the outlaws laughed as they realized the tragic play that they were witnessing. In the cabin of Carlos, Catalina knelt by her son's bed and poured into his ears all that had taken place between Jerry and herself. Then she brought out the tobacco pouch.

"He says that he has proof, my boy," she wailed, "but how about this? Does an innocent one carry his tobacco in the pouch of a dead man?"

"I have seen Per Schedule's eyes," answered Carlos. "And I have been in his clutches and allowed to go free. Wait until you have learned what he has to show you. Then do what you will. I believe in that American, my mother, for I have seen the working

centers of his eyes. They are honest eyes. I am better, mother, and I would like to get into my clothes."

From the main building came a cry.

"Come and get some cheer, boys," it was Bad Jack Hatch speaking. "El Sabueso is opening the last of his champagne!"

A rush of running boots sounded on the gravel outside.

CHAPTER IX.

JERRY FIGHTS BAD JACK.

FOR some time the sounds of revelry came from the large ranch house, and these cries of mirth and boasting had in them a quality of madness.

But of a sudden the hilarity ceased. Jerry, straining his ears to catch occasional words, learned that arriving messengers had brought the information that Bar Heart Bar hands were assembled in force in the hills. Soon the galloping of horses told of outlaws, who had ridden away to guard the approaches to the desert. After a while Bad Jack Hatch pushed open the door.

"There's food coming to you," he said. "Food that will set you up so that I can knock you down. You and me has it out for the tickling of the boys to-night."

"You're sure a hound for punishment," retorted Jerry with a smile. "What I have done, I can do again. And to-night I'll dish you a mess of fists that'll make you think that somebody upset a yellow jacket's nest on your head."

"I was drunk that time in Alamogordo. You can't whip one side of me. Not one side of me!" Hatch asserted.

"You must have been drunk to pile onto that crippled boy. What did he ever do to you?" Jerry asked.

"Do? Say, if it hadn't been for him—but never mind. What I did I did—that's all. He was snooping around, trying to get a line on me and my boys. I plugged his game and set him on his way, only——" Bad Jack Hatch hesitated.

"Only you bumped into me and built a fire under yourself, eh?"

Hatch's heavy brows contracted into creases. He plucked bits of straw from the floor in response to some sudden abstraction of mind. Then he roused and stared into Jerry's face.

"If you want to get yourself all the coin that you'll ever need, you can sure do it, right now, with me," he seemed to whisper the words—to abandon his customary loud and dissonant tone. It was as though he feared that his voice would be heard by the Mexican watchers outside the door. Jerry was nonplused and yet curiously interested.

"Meaning exactly what kind of crookedness?" he asked.

"If you would throw in with me I'd sure split with you, when we romp over to Bar Heart Bar and take a wagonload of Spanish gold out of that old place."

"But how about Cortez?" Jerry asked.

Jack looked toward the door.

"That's why I want you. You'll kill him, after we get out of him what we want," Hatch explained.

"And that is?"

"The place where this gold is hidden," Bad Jack Hatch answered.

"Does El Sabueso know this?" Jerry questioned him.

"Sure! He just found it out."

"From whom?"

Hatch seemed to wilt and shrink before the piercing eyes of Per Schedule. Then he laughed.

"That settles it," he said. "You've bit off your last chance, kid. I was for giving you a way out; but now, since it's information that you want, I see that before you'd double cross Cortez you'd leave the gate open to hand me the good-by. To-night I beat you to a pulp and, when that's done, I send back

your ears to that girl Lindell and Old Bob Florrisant."

Jerry winced, and the sound of his grinding teeth hissed through the room like a hidden rattler's burr.

"I s'pose," he said, "that to-night's scrap means that, if I get the best of you, one of your boys or Cortez kills me?"

"If you whip me, you get yours, just the same. Only you don't get interfered with in the scrap. You can pound me into jelly and not a man will lift a finger. But, when you're all done, then is when the light goes out and your ears start across the hills with our ultimatum to Bob Florrisant."

Jerry laughed in Bad Jack Hatch's face just as the door opened and Catalina entered carrying a steaming pan of food. Bad Jack watched the old woman as she laid down the container and, standing before Jerry, slapped his face.

"I feed you," she shrilled "with my own spoon. Then, when the sun goes down, I watch Señor Hatch beat you to a pulp with his hands. After that—ha! ha! ha!" she scooped up a mass of beans and meat and shoved it into Jerry's mouth. Bad Jack chuckled, stared at Per Schedule with a quizzical look, filled with unmistakable admiration, then turned and, leaving the building, quickly closed the door behind him. After he was gone, Catalina went over and placed her lips beside Jerry's ear.

"Quick!" she murmured in a fragment of sound, "tell me what it is that you want me to see."

"Reach there, just inside my waist band," Jerry directed.

The trembling hands of the old woman found and brought out the locket that Jerry had taken from Lorenzo Del Gado's body. This Catalina opened and at a glance, by the light which streaked through a door crack, she read the note that Lorenzo had left at Maria's door, and the one that had been pinned to his body.

These she stuffed within her bosom. Then she wavered on her knees, seemed about to swoon, but of a sudden jerked rigid and whispered.

"I know now. I know who it was that hung my boy. It was Cortez. This note that you have brought to me is in the red writing of the Bloodhound of señora. And for this proof, I shall risk the life of Carlos and myself. You are to die, after the sun goes down. You knew that?"

"Yes, Hatch and Cortez have made that plain enough," Jerry said.

"But only after you have fought! Those beasts of Bad Jack Hatch and El Sabueso insist on seeing you fight. After that affair you will be killed. But my boy and I have a plan, and if it works, then——"

"Hurry up, there, old woman!" a voice shouted from the outside.

"I'm coming, señor, in but a moment!" answered Catalina.

"Will I see you again?" whispered Jerry.

"I cannot tell," the old woman replied.

"How about my horse?"

"It is in the stable. Cortez rides it on the morrow."

Catalina fed Jerry the contents of the pan, looked tenderly into his eyes, and rushed from the room. Just outside the door she met Cortez. He spoke to her in a loud tone. Jerry caught each word and somehow these buoyed him to a supreme degree.

"How's your son?" asked Cortez.

"He sits in a chair, señor. He is much better. I have fed his ears on the tale about this man who destroyed my Lorenzo. Carlos is hungry for vengeance and will come to you, as is his due, for the privilege of sticking his own knife in the heart of Jerry Kerry," the old woman remarked.

"Bah! he's a weakling. We'll do

that sticking ourselves. But the two of you can see the fun. Tell Carlos that, when the sun goes down, I want all the windows to the big house shuttered and barred on the outside. I want no light to guide these American devils across this desert, should any of them get by my brave guards. Nor do I want——"

"Bar the windows, señor?" the old woman interrupted him.

"Yes. Put up the shutters and bar all windows. I fight Biloxi, and I want none of his friends, outside, looking in. That way is danger from a shot in my back," Cortez continued.

"You will fight him in that room alone?"

"No, I fight before them all. But, before that fight, all men will be disarmed and their weapons locked in the side room. I will have the key to that door."

"I shall do as you say. May I help my boy, his body is still sore, poor lad?" Catalina asked him.

Something like exultation seemed buried in that request. And the tone awoke a responsive chord in Jerry Kerry's mind.

"Yes," answered Cortez. "Perhaps your hands would make a good job of it."

The sound of the old woman's feet, paddling off, came to Jerry with a gladsome note. Cortez spoke to the guards, then walked away. The light faded, night was coming on fast.

Finally, the lock rattled, a light swept through the door, five men jostled him to his feet and shuffled him along until he was thrown into the large ranch house. Here a remarkable sight met his eyes.

Mexicans and Americans, to the number of thirty or forty, were ranged about the room—some standing, some squatting, others occupying chairs. In a twelve-foot square, in the center of the room, about which grouped the men, Bad Jack Hatch stood with El Sabueso. Both men were nude to their waists. To one side, and watching first the face of the one and then that of the other, lounged Biloxi—his huge torso glinting in the candle and wood-fire light like that of some ape.

"Men," announced Bad Jack Hatch in Spanish, "we took all guns and knives from you boys, because we didn't want any monkey business here during these fights. Biloxi and Cortez hate each other and agree to fight it out. No man is to interfere. Everything goes until one or the other hollers 'enough.' Do you understand?"

"Let it begin!" cried a cowboy.

"Start it!" yelled a Mexican.

Biloxi stepped to the center of the cleared spot on the floor.

And after him strode the catlike Cortez.

Jerry considered the remarkable physique of the Mexican. Long, lean, trained by the saddle, until there wasn't a spare pound of fat on his frame, he looked like a piece of bronze mechanism, so deeply brown was his flesh. Catalina came through the door and after her Carlos.

"Señors," she said calmly.

"Yes, old woman, what is it?" asked Hatch.

"All the windows are shuttered and barred, but, as we came around, one of the guards near the hay-field fence yelled and asked if he might come in and see the fights. What shall I tell him?"

"Who is he?" queried El Sabueso.

"Fierro, señor," was the answer.

"Yes," yelled Cortez, "let him come."

The old woman slipped from the room and soon returned with Fierro whose horse could be heard stomping the earth at a near-by hitch rack.

"Are you ready?" cried Hatch.

Biloxi nodded, and Cortez rushed at him. It was the onslaught of a tiger, that rush, and it stupefied the slow-

moving Biloxi. Cortez surely knew how to use his fists. Twice he landed on the American's head. Then Biloxi unlimbered. His long and grotesque arms reached out, as a bear reaches out, and with a huge side swipe he slapped the head of the Mexican twice with an enormous paw. It was an open-hand blow, and it rang through the room like a plank smacking a plank. All the Americans in the room guffawed. But Cortez maintained his feet and came out of the mêlée in a side-twisting shaky motion that allowed him to crack Biloxi's chin twice.

Biloxi shambled forward and, with unbelievable and clumsy swiftness, pinioned the arms of his antagonist. But one of the Mexican's feet jerked a stiffened leg out of place, and Biloxi fell to the earthern floor, the Mexican on top. Then began a fierce scrambling for position. Once Cortez flung out a foot that caught the American under the chin and sent back his head like a pump handle. Again the foot struck, and once more the head flopped.

But, even as the Mexican's leg was reaching for the chin of Biloxi, the American's great limbs caught the greaser's body in a perfect grapevine, and Cortez's face blanched to the color of chalky gray. No one saw just how it occurred, but one of Biloxi's hands was seen to flash, the Mexican's head went back like a rocket, and the room was filled with a shrieking cry of agony.

"Don't! don't blind me!" he cried.

"Yell 'enough!'" answered Biloxi, and then Jerry saw. The squat figure of the American was contorted almost out of shape. One of its long arms had circled the neck of El Sabueso, and Biloxi's thumb was buried laterally in the eye socket of the Mexican.

"Enough!" wailed Cortez. Then he fainted.

Biloxi arose, stood for a mute second of time staring down at the broken form on the floor, then turned and walked to where his shirt and jacket hung upon a peg.

"You're next!" cried Bad Jack Hatch staring at Jerry. "Come and get yours, kid!"

The cry that arose from the onlookers was filled with fear. It shook the timbered roof, and grew in ferocity, until it worked up the Mexicans to a furious hysteria. Toward these men, Jerry stared and smiled cynically into their faces. Then, as he arose, and jerked off his shirt, he hurried a loud string of badinage at the greasers as he turned to walk toward Hatch.

At that instant, he felt a vast and intuitive security amounting to a surge of exultation; to a tremendous gusto for life.

To be continued in the next issue of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE.

HONORING OREGON TRAIL PIONEERS

IN the course of recent excavation for the Guernsey dam reservoir, near Guernsey, Wyoming, it was found that the graves of some of the pioneers who had lost their lives in the journey over the Old Oregon Trail many years ago must be disturbed. At once plans were made to remove these remains to a suitable memorial cemetery and bury them with appropriate honors. While the work on the reservoir was in progress, indications of an old pioneer camping place, with a dirt entrenchment behind, were found, together with three graves, near the mouth of Broom Creek. It seemed evident that the place had been the scene of an Indian raid on the pioneers, who had made a heroic stand behind their dirt fortification.

Desert Ditched

By Frank Triem

Author of "He Who Brays Last," etc.

HE was a little, mouselike man, with a wisp of faded whisker dangling from his chin, and with sad, disillusioned eyes. His hair, scanty to the point of complete absence, was of faded brown; and his face was weather-beaten by years of the desert sun. He was wholly inconspicuous, and in a crowd would have passed unnoticed. Like the buttons on a man's shirt or the hat on his head, he simply didn't register. His name, Joe Reid, was in keeping with his personality.

Now, however, as he stood in the door of the little adobe shack which, until his arrival an hour before, had been vacant, his eyes bore a look of hope, almost of exultation, for his brief inspection of the surrounding desert had revealed no sign of human life. It looked as if he had, at last, succeeded in losing Larry Anderson.

As he turned and reëntered the cabin, the little man, with the discouraged mustache and the sad eyes, was reviewing his long partnership with Anderson. It was a matter, now, of some two years' standing; but that hadn't been Joe Reid's fault. Anderson, like a parasite, had lived almost entirely on the activity of his small partner. Three times Reid had tried to shake him, but always he had failed—chiefly because he couldn't get a good start.

Then had come the day when Joe Reid struck a pocket. He had taken out a modest fortune in nuggets. And this he had been forced to divide equally with Larry Anderson. The two ill-matched men had then hastened to town. Anderson had made a rush for the nearest saloon, while Joe Reid had turned his weary steps straight toward the little hotel.

Before he had got settled, however, it had occurred to him that this was an excellent opportunity to rid himself of the parasite. Anderson would almost certainly drink all that he could hold. And he would probably be insensible

for a good many hours. Five hours head start was all Joe Reid needed.

So he had hurried back to the livery stable, had taken out the burros, and had acquired a fresh supply of food at the store. He hadn't even waited to bank his share of the gold, but had tucked the little sack away in one of the packs Then, with jubilant heart he had headed into the desert.

All day Joe Reid had marched until, with the sinking of the sun into an amber horizon, he had come to this forgotten cabin. He had seen no sign of pursuit during the day. And it was beginning to look as if he had, at last, shaken Larry Anderson.

It continued to seem so during the next half hour, while Joe Reid labored industriously at his task of arranging his supplies and making the cabin habitable for a stay of two or three months. And then, as he was cleaning out the old bunk preparatory to unrolling his blankets in it, his keen ears caught a sound—a sound that brought a look of despair to his face. He raised his head, staring through the fast-thickening gloom out the open door. It came again —unmistakably the measured pound of animals' hoofs. Although he knew what to expect, he crossed wearily to the door and stared out.

A scant fifty yards away Joe Reid saw them—three moving blots. Two were burros, heavily loaded; and the third was a weary horse on which was fastened a great, bulky object. That ponderous man was none other than Larry Anderson.

So, after all, he had failed, Reid told himself miserably. Somehow the parasite had got on his trail and had followed him here. He hadn't had enough of a head start. Now Anderson was once more fastened to him like the old man of the sea, expecting to live at his ease while he, Reid, labored.

A great sense of injustice descended upon the mouselike little man in the door, so that he dropped his hand to the butt of his single-action .45. Only for an instant, however, did his fingers curl around the weapon's worn stocks; his hand came away as quickly as it had fallen. The problem could never be solved that way.

Two minutes later, the three animals had halted a scant ten feet from the door, and, with an abysmal sigh the great Larry Anderson slid to the ground. As he waddled toward the dimly visible opening, Joe Reid could make out that he was smiling—a furtive smile of triumph.

In the silence of abject misery the little man stood aside, and the big fellow entered the cabin. Not a word passed between them. Both understood the situation, and there was nothing to say.

Larry Anderson seated himself with a weary grunt upon the edge of the bunk. Joe Reid was fumbling about in one of the sacks of supplies. He presently drew forth a small cardboard box containing candles. He scratched a match and lit one, held it horizontally so that a few drops melted away and fell upon the rough table, then set the candle down in the little pool. Then, with his hands on his hips, he surveyed the bulky man who had followed him here.

Larry Anderson was the first to speak.

"Thought you'd ditched me, didn't you?" he queried. His tone alternated between a sneer and a whine, and he glanced swiftly about the cabin without once allowing his eyes to come to rest upon the other. "Yes, I reckon you did —but I fooled you! I knowed you'd try something like this, seein' as how you've done it before. An' when I went into the saloon, I simply marched through out a side door. It was easy to foller you——"

Joe Reid grunted enigmatically, and turned toward the little sheet-iron stove that he had been setting up on an empty

box in one corner. As he finished the task and put the miniature piping in place, he was conscious of the other's regard fixed upon his back.

A little later he addressed a remark to Anderson.

"Take that bucket out to the spring an' fill it, Larry——" he ordered.

The big man interrupted him with an oath.

"Do it yourself, Joe," he growled. "I'm a tired lady, I am—I ain't gonna move from this bunk until to-morrow!"

In this, Larry Anderson proved that he was a man of his word. Joe Reid did all the labor of toting water, building the fire, and cooking supper, and afterwards of cleaning up the débris. Larry Anderson managed to haul his ungainly bulk up to the table, and to devour an amazing amount of beans and bacon and hot coffee; and, thereafter, he settled down in the bunk which Joe Reid had prepared for himself. Within ten minutes he was snoring.

That was an auspicious beginning. And during the next week, Larry Anderson continued to live at his ease—sitting tilted back in a chair just inside the door of the building, smoking, and watching with a sort of amused contempt while Joe Reid grubbed about the desert. Although the smaller man was an indefatigable prospector, Anderson himself knew little about the business—and cared even less for it. Anything that entailed physical labor was strictly taboo with Anderson. Besides, he told himself, why should he work when he could get an equal half of anything Joe Reid found?

Such were his speculations and thoughts when, one blazing afternoon approximately a week after his coming, he suddenly perceived the form of his small partner half a mile or so away. Larry Anderson had been sitting tilted back in his crude chair, smoking; but now he came up for air with a bounce. Even at this distance it was apparent that the little man was excited. What could have got him into such a state except the discovery of gold? The big fellow's heart began to thump heavily, and his little, piggy eyes narrowed.

He continued to watch in tense interest, while Joe Reid galloped toward him. When, at last, the small man had arrived, however, Anderson got little information. Reid flopped down upon the doorstep, leaned against the edge of the wall, and began to gasp like a fish out of water. He had obviously run a considerable distance.

So for the next five minutes the big man waited impatiently. Reid was breathing heavily and looking up at him in a curious manner, he perceived.

And then, at last, Joe Reid answered his question.

"What's up, you say?" the little fellow wheezed. "Plenty—I just struck gold, out there a ways—struck it——"

Again Reid halted while he seemed to consider. He was studying the face of his partner intently. And slowly the enthusiasm and excitement in his eyes died out. A minute later he again spoke.

"Struck a small claim, and I reckon I got too much excited!" he explained. "It ain't so good, but it'll pay me to work it. I'll let you know this evenin'."

And with that he got to his feet and headed at a leisurely pace back the way he had come.

Larry Anderson watched him go with narrowed, speculative eyes. There was something queer about the whole business, he told himself—it had seemed, at first, as if Reid had made a rich strike. Then his sudden calmness—his disclosure of a small find——

Anderson drove one flabby fist into the palm of the other hand and stood up.

"I'm betting that he's got something good!" he mumbled. "Yes, sir—and he thinks that he'll keep it all for himself. But I'll show him different. I'm

his partner whether he wants me or not, and we go fifty-fifty. I reckon that I'll just have a look at this little claim of his."

Distasteful as any sort of physical exertion was to him, Larry Anderson jammed his broad-brimmed straw hat down upon his head, gritted his teeth on the stem of his pipe, and stepped out into the blazing sunlight. He waddled at his best pace after the retreating Joe Reid, who was, by now, a hundred yards or so away.

Reid turned presently, saw him, and came to a halt. Anderson hurried forward until he had reached the smaller man's side. The other was staring doubtfully up at him, he saw.

"Just thought that I'd take a look at this discovery, Joe," the fat man explained. "I admit that I don't know much about minin', but I'd like to take a look, anyway!"

Joe Reid hesitated for just an instant; then he grunted a surly "c'mon!" He turned and led the way through a sea of scrubby sagebrush.

For the next ten minutes Larry Anderson puffed along in the wake of his little partner. It was infernally hot, and perspiration was streaming down his red face and neck. He stuck grimly to his determination, however, and, at last, they came to a deep and rather narrow arroyo. Here Reid halted.

"There she is!" he announced briefly, waving toward a bank of loose sand and gravel on the opposite side of the ditch. A pick and shovel lay close by. Larry Anderson squinted helplessly down, then went scrambling to the bottom of the cut, and approached the bank of loose stuff.

"Not so good," Joe Reid volunteered shortly. "But still, it'll pay me to work it——"

To himself, Larry Anderson was lamenting the fact that he had never picked up enough knowledge of mining matters to judge the value of the present find. But he had a feeling that Joe Reid was understating the facts—that, in all probability, there was a great deal of wealth in the loose stuff at his feet. He glowered suspiciously at the little man, then turned and, without a word, made his way up the side of the arroyo. As he marched back to the cabin, he was revolving various schemes and possibilities within his mind.

"I'm gonna have my share!" he repeated over and over to himself. "Yes, sir, I certainly am; but how'll I find out what he's taking out of that bank? He might cache it——"

The rest of that afternoon he sat at his usual post just inside the door, glowering out across the shimmering vistas of sage and mesquite in the direction of the new find. And that evening, when Joe Reid came limping painfully in, Larry Anderson broached the subject. His tone was a sort of whining entreaty.

"What d'you suppose we'll make outa this, Joe?" he demanded.

Joe Reid had been slicing bacon. Now he deliberately set down the knife and side of meat, and turned to where his fat partner was sitting. There was a hint of resolution in his usually meek face, and he pointed one finger warningly at Anderson.

"Where do you get that 'we' stuff?" he inquired. "just forget it, because this ain't a 'we' proposition. That find is mine—I discovered it, an' I'm doin' all the work."

Larry Anderson removed his pipe from his mouth. He was staring in wide-eyed surprise at the partner who, for so long, had been under his thumb. This was something new to Anderson; Joe Reid was staging a revolt!

He opened his thick lips to speak, but no sound came from him. The little man and the big one stared fixedly at each other for a full minute before Anderson dropped his glance. But, as

he peered down at the bowl of his pipe, his eyes glittered in a curious manner, and his breath came faster.

Nothing more was said about the matter, however, and the evening passed much as usual. Next morning Joe Reid was the first up. He started a fire in the sheet-iron stove, cooked breakfast, and afterward tramped out the door and away toward the scene of his day's labors.

From the security of his bunk, Larry Anderson watched him go, then presently got to his feet and ate breakfast. He was trying to decide what to do next. Joe Reid's sudden revolt had complicated matters for him, and he hardly knew how to proceed. In actual physical combat, he could have whipped a dozen like Reid; but Anderson didn't have nerve enough to start anything. Both carried guns, and it was always possible that Reid would beat him to the draw. He would have to manage some other way, he decided.

He finished eating, stacked the dirty dishes in the dishpan for Joe Reid to wash when he came back, and crossed to the door. A breath of wind was in the sage; far, far above, a buzzard circled on silent wings. The song of a cactus wren, incredibly lonesome and forlorn, reached his ears.

A moment or two Larry Anderson stood there, staring about him. Then he took down his dilapidated straw hat from its peg near the door, jammed it on his head, and sallied forth. He headed at a leisurely pace out across the desert toward Reid's mine.

He was yet fifty yards or so from the arroyo, when he caught the sound of industrious digging. Anderson approached silently and, for a long moment, stood looking down. Reid hadn't discovered him, he told himself, but next instant the smaller man turned and peered up at him.

Larry Anderson grinned. If he felt any sudden uneasiness, he didn't show it. Instead, he seated himself on the margin of the arroyo and began to fill his pipe.

"I come out to watch you work—on *our* mine!" he drawled, staring unwinkingly down at Reid. "I'm kinda anxious——"

Then Larry Anderson halted. His hands grew still, and his face turned a shade paler. For Joe Reid had dropped his shovel, reached up and was clawing at his throat as if he were choking. His face and neck were the color of brick, and his usually mild eyes flashed.

"Our claim?" he cried shrilly. "Ours? Mine, you mean—this is my gold and I mean to keep all of it—mine——"

It is doubtful whether Anderson realized what he was doing; but the fact remains that he dropped one flabby hand to the butt of his gun. Joe Reid cried out. Before the big man could lift the weapon from its holster, however, Reid had drawn his own revolver. Its bleak muzzle pointed squarely at the other's heart.

"Up with 'em!" Reid barked. "Up——"

For just a fraction of a second Anderson hesitated, then his arms went above his head. Joe Reid scrambled up the side of the arroyo and was standing above him. With one hand the little man took the other's gun. He thrust it inside his shirt, then pointed toward the bank of loose gravel.

"Half yours, is it?" he shrilled. "All right, then—down with you and get busy. Believe me, you're going to earn all that you take out! Now make it snappy."

In a sort of dazed silence, Larry Anderson gained his feet. Next instant he was tumbling down the side of the arroyo, his briskness due largely to a vigorous shove that came from behind. He lit in a choking cloud of dust, and scrambled to his feet. Joe Reid was

seated on the edge of the arroyo, his gun held ready for action.

"Get busy!" he snarled, waving toward the sand bank. "I'll just sit here an' watch you work—on *our* claim!"

Larry Anderson got busy. All that morning he labored down in the bed of the arroyo, while the sun poured its blinding, baking rays upon him, and Joe Reid sat at his ease and directed operations. Perspiration streamed from him until he was soaked, as thoroughly soaked as if he had been plunged bodily into a lake. In no time at all his arms were scalded by the sun. Great blisters formed on his hands; they broke and were replaced by open sores. Anderson moaned and lamented his evil fortune, but Joe Reid was adamant. At noon, without once relaxing his vigilance, he herded the big fellow back to the cabin and fed him; then they returned to the arroyo.

There followed a period that Anderson felt sure must be all of a month. The sun had forgotten to set, he decided; it was remaining motionless in the blazing blue of the sky, like a great luminous button sewed to a shirt. His mouth was cracked dry; his throat and lungs ached from the clouds of dust that he had raised in his mining operations. But always the slightest let-down in his endeavors was greeted by a warning from the little man on the bank. Once the gun roared, and its heavy bullet spat into the gravel between Anderson's feet. For the next half hour, he fairly outdid himself.

But, at last, the long afternoon dragged to an end, and Joe Reid motioned him to come up out of the pit. Wheezing like a leaky bellows, Anderson did as he was directed. In the silence of abject misery the big fellow led the way across the desert toward the adobe hut.

That evening, while he lay aching and cursing in his bunk, a plan came to Larry Anderson. Although he perceived that Joe Reid intended the present schedule to continue, he had other ideas. While his pard was conscious it would be dangerous to tackle him; but later, when he was asleep——

Burning with impatience, Larry Anderson watched the silent Joe Reid as the latter cleaned house. Afterward, seated on the doorstep and gazing out across the twilight-shrouded desert, the little man smoked a pipe; and shortly, thereafter, Reid knocked out the ashes on the edge of the door, got to his feet, and crossed to his blankets in one corner. Two minutes later he had blown out the candle, and had extended himself at full length upon the floor. In the last feeble rays of daylight Larry Anderson could dimly see him there.

A silence brooded over the place—a silence that to the big man seemed ominous, premonitory. Once, coming from close by, the howl of a coyote startled him; then again that complete absence of sound possessed the cabin. He lay on his side, staring out across the room. Vaguely he could make out the shadowy proportions of the table, of a chair beside the door, and of the stove. A window high in the opposite wall glowed, as if done in luminous paint. By and by a thin slice of yellow moonlight crept across the floor.

And the invisible Joe Reid breathed more deeply. Larry Anderson listened for a long time, trying to get up courage to put his plan into execution. He felt sure that the little man was really asleep, but, like most bullies, Anderson was also something of a coward. He pictured himself creeping through the blackness; the sudden, stabbing flash of light; the roaring report of a gun. He could almost feel the sickening impact of a heavy bullet. And for a long time he was powerless to move.

But, at last, Anderson fought down his fears. He threw his legs over the edge of the bunk, and his feet were on

the floor. Another long minute the big man sat on the edge of the bunk, listening to that steady breathing; then he was on his feet.

He took a step forward, and another. His heart was thudding, apparently in his throat, and his knees shook under him. Another step—he brushed against the table. Another——

Then he halted, quaking. That steady breathing had ceased! Out of a terrible silence, Joe Reid's voice cut sharply.

"One more step an' I'll shoot! I knowed you'd try something like this—but I'm a mighty light sleeper. Next time I won't warn you. Get back to your bunk!"

Larry Anderson squeaked like a rat, turned, and obeyed with terrified haste. He climbed in, groaning at the protest of his tortured muscles. And the remainder of that night he kept his place. He had had enough of that, he told himself—he would have to think up some other scheme.

The next day was much the same as its predecessor save, perhaps, that it was worse. His outraged muscles caused him agonies and more than once he felt as if he must be going mad. The routine of his labor resolved itself into a nightmare jumble; Larry Anderson dimly perceived that he was working on and on, like a machine. As on the previous day, they returned to the cabin at noon for lunch; then again he was back in the bed of the arroyo. And always Joe Reid remained upon the bank, his gun ready, his eyes narrowed and watchful. Bitterly Anderson lamented his rashness in trying to get half of the other's mine; that had been the thing that had finally brought Joe Reid into open rebellion.

Then, after an eternity of blazing heat and monotonous labor, the sun was sinking into the west, and Joe Reid was motioning him to come out of the arroyo. Anderson dropped the pick he had been wielding and climbed slowly from the depression. Reid, he perceived, was staring up at him in a curious manner.

"You done good to-day, Larry," the other was saying. "You took out better by three ounces 'an yesterday——"

Then it happened—the thing that gave the captive his chance. For, as Reid turned toward home, he tripped—waved his arms wildly—and went to his hands and knees. The gun half buried itself in the sand at his side.

Wide-eyed and scarcely comprehending, Larry Anderson peered down. He saw Reid gathering his muscles for the effort necessary to regain his feet; saw him with one hand grope for the gun. Then the big man shook off his stupid lethargy—and leaped.

Under his ponderous weight, Reid went as flat as if he were a bug under some heavy thumb. He was gasping for breath, while Anderson sat astride of him and possessed himself of the revolver. The big man hardly realized at first just what this meant; but slowly he perceived that he was once again master. And with this realization came a great sense of exultation.

Larry Anderson got to his feet after he had caught his breath, reached down, and unceremoniously dragged Joe Reid erect. Anderson prodded his captive in the ribs with the muzzle of the revolver, and pointed toward the distant cabin.

"March!" he commanded. "And watch your step!"

Joe Reid stared up at him in a curious manner, then turned, and led the way as directed. Anderson followed him, trying to decide what to do next.

They reached the cabin presently, and Joe Reid entered. The little man had been meek and apparently resigned to his fate; but Larry Anderson was taking no chances. His first task was to obtain a length of stout cord and bind his partner's arms and ankles securely. Afterwards, he made Reid sit down in

the one chair. Here he lashed him so that movement was apparently impossible.

Anderson stood back and surveyed his work with a pleased leer, then seated himself on the edge of the bunk and, for a long time, considered the situation. At last, he reached a decision. He turned to where Joe Reid was bound, and told his plan.

"I'm gonna leave you right here, Joe," he explained with a self-satisfied smirk. "I got it all doped out. I'll put up markers, or whatever you call 'em, and hike into town. I'll register this find in my own name, come back, an' turn you loose. You should have been willing to give me half, because now I'm gonna take the whole thing!"

Joe Reid followed him with his eyes as, during the next five minutes, the big man got together the materials needed for the trip into town. At last, Anderson left the cabin; and, thereafter, Reid could hear him in the little corral they had built in back of the house. A short time later, Anderson returned leading a bridled horse. Out from under the bunk he hauled a saddle; a few minutes after that he had mounted and was ready to go.

Anderson brought the horse alongside the open door and grinned in at Reid. He waved one arm mockingly.

"S'long, Joe," he called. "I'll see you in a day or two. Be a good kid and don't get into mischief!"

Reid listened to the receding hoofbeats of the big man's horse until they had died out in the desert silence. The twilight was gathering thick in the corners of the cabin; dimly he could make out the familiar details of stove, and table, and bunk. Through the open door he could see a great blue-white star low on the horizon. Night was at hand.

The thud of hoofs was gone, and silence reigned. Joe Reid sighed, bent forward, and straightened his knees. He was standing on his feet—much humped up, it is true, but still capable of locomotion in an erratic manner. He managed to get himself across to the cupboard in which were kept the food and kitchen implements. He backed around to it, raised himself upon his tiptoes, and succeeded in jamming his bound hands down into the little box in which were kept the knives and forks.

It was slow, tedious work, the task of hacking the cords from his wrists. He had to manipulate the handle of the dull old kitchen knife with his finger tips, and more than once he narrowly avoided dropping the implement; but he persevered, and an hour or so later the cords began to give. He jerked and strained at them, he felt the stout twine parting—and was free! Larry Anderson had never been very intelligent, he told himself with a chuckle, and his method of tying a man up had been far from perfect.

It was the work of but a moment to slack the hemp that held him in the chair and that which held his ankles together. He got to his feet—stretched a bit—and crossed to the door.

For a long moment he stared out into the star-lit desert, his glance fastened upon the point toward which Larry Anderson had gone. Joe Reid's lips twitched, they parted, and a dry chuckle escaped him.

Whatever the joke was, however, Larry Anderson wasn't in on it. As he sent his horse at a steady pace across the night-shrouded vistas of mesquite, and sage, he felt enormously satisfied with himself. He realized that Joe Reid would have a hard time of it, lashed to that chair, during the next day or two; but that didn't matter so far as he was concerned. After leaving the cabin, he had measured out a square of earth embracing the mine, and had erected little stone monuments at each corner. He knew absolutely nothing about staking a claim, but he scrawled his name on

four squares of paper and placed one at each corner. Now, he felt pretty certain that it remained only to register the location in his name.

All that night he traveled steadily. Eventually the moon rose and lighted his way; and as he dropped into the west, the horizon began to glow with the coming of morning. Larry Anderson yawned and stared about him. He felt that he should reach his destination before long.

And he was right. The sun was still low when he came to the outskirts of the desert town. It was the county seat, and Anderson made his way at once to the courthouse. His haste was needless, however, for he waited on the steps a good half hour before the first sleepy clerks began to appear.

But eventually he accomplished his purpose. With the claim registered on the county's books in his name, he made his way out into the hot sunlight of the desert morning, mounted his horse, and rode down the main street to a restaurant. He left the animal at a livery stable to be fed and gone over, then ate a great deal, paid his check, and was ready to go.

When he returned to the stable for his horse, the man in attendance shook his head dubiously.

"Wouldn't ride him too far, brother," the stranger told Anderson. "You ain't exactly under weight, and he shows that he's been worked purty hard. Why not be considerate and give him a few hours' rest?"

But Anderson couldn't see it. Five minutes later he rode forth from the stable and headed up the deserted street. A little after that he had left the town behind him and was well on his way toward the cabin.

More than once during the course of that long ride Anderson regretted that he hadn't taken the stable boy's advice. The sun beat down without mercy; it wilted him as if he had been made of wax, and the horse plodded forward without animation. But now that he had started, there was nothing for it but to go forward. And so they went on, seldom stopping to rest.

The sun was low on the horizon when, at last, Larry Anderson sighted the cabin. Apparently far away, he knew that another fifteen minutes would see him inside its door. He couldn't help grinning a little as he thought of how tired Joe Reid must be of staying in one place.

On he rode until, at last, he drew rein before the shack. It was open as he had left it; dimly he could see the interior. He threw one leg across the horse's back and quickly slid to the ground.

"Well, Joe, she's mine!" he called as he strode toward the opening. "Next time you'll——"

He came to a halt, blinked rapidly, and then uttered a strangled grunt. For Joe Reid was gone! The equipment, the food, the pack-saddles—all were missing.

Something was wrong, the big man told himself—radically wrong. Breathing heavily, he entered and glanced about him. A folded square of white on the table caught his eye, and he picked it up. A note——

"Larry," he read. "I'm rid of you at last. The mine was a fake—I planted some of my gold there. I knowed that you would do just what you done. Now I got it all back, and I'm rid of you. Try and foller me! Very truly yours, Joe Reid."

Larry Anderson set the note down on the table and crossed to the door. For a long time he stood there, staring out at the deepening sky. Once only an angry grunt burst from him as he realized that Joe Reid had escaped for good.

The worm had turned. And, figuratively speaking, it had not only turned on him but it had bitten him severely.

Bucking with Bar C

By George Gilbert

Author of "Without Quarter," etc.

CHAPTER XXIX.

HOP ON AN EGGSHELL.

"I WONDER if the person who got that canoe saw us?" Cricket asked.

"We weren't right out in sight—maybe not," Casey Jones said.

They had, by now, drawn back behind the grass screen that fringed the slough's shore line.

They watched that other shore line, where the canoe had disappeared; but not a movement of the long grass rewarded their watchfulness.

The afternoon shadows lengthened. Dusk came, as they watched, tense and eager. Often they whispered their hopes and fears.

"It was just a trick of those cow thieves," Andy Tice told them. "They remembered that canoe and sent a man to draw it back."

"But why didn't he show himself?" Cricket asked.

"Afraid of a possible six-gun bullet," was the reply.

"Maybe—but it's queer."

It was Judith who pointed out the new movement of the grass screen. They watched again, while the canoe's nose was thrust forth. It remained a long, long time, like a duck about to take flight, on the surface of the mysterious slough. Then, as the dusk closed down, the canoe started forth again, its full length pushed from the grass screen by a powerful set of muscles. They saw a form emerge from the grass screen over there and get into the canoe.

"We'll lay low till he lands, then jump him," Cricket planned out the attack. Judith and Marvel Osgood, mindful of the welfare of their patient, had gone back to the cabin, where they could give The Poco Kid needed attention.

The light craft came slowly along.

"I don't think that he's paddlin'—he's usin' a settin' pole," Andy Tice told them. "I can tell by the sounds

that he makes in gettin' that canoe along."

"Takes pretty good ears to tell that. You'd tell the difference between a snapping turtle and a fish swimmin' at a thousand yards," Casey Jones grumbled.

"Easy now, tame that thunderin' whisper of yours—he'll hear us," Cricket warned.

"Draw back behind the grass. When he comes through, we'll all jump him," Andy Tice planned the attack.

The canoe came on quietly and steadily. Finally it seemed to halt and go no further.

"His pole's too short; he's using it for a paddle. Mighty slow goin' that way in that black ooze," Casey Jones whispered again.

Suddenly the pole seemed to have found bottom, for, through the spaces in the grass screen, they could see the canoe leap forward, and then the nose of it touched the marge.

"Get ready, men," Cricket whispered. "No gun play; we want this duck alive, for he may be able to tell us a few things that we want to know."

"He's a tough-lookin' nut—no hat, big beard—I can see that against the skyline, tall, long arms—now——" some one began.

The man from the canoe had parted the grass screen, and now stood peering into the gathering gloom at the open space beyond.

With a yell, the Bar C outfit leaped, grasping the intruder; and they all went down in a clawing mass that finally came to a state of rest, with Teaser Rines on top, shouting:

"Soak him, Cricket—soak him! Don't let him get away."

"I've got him, right by the collar," Cricket groaned, from the bottom of the pile of humanity.

"I've got a leg," Casey Jones intoned in muffled tones from the interior of the tangled group.

"I've got a beard—a regular beard," Andy Tice bawled.

"What's going on?" said Judith, coming on the run.

"We've captured one of them," Teaser Rines shouted, leaping atop the pile again.

"One of what?" called Marvel.

"One of those devils that came over in the canoe——"

"Hey!" came a deep, muffled voice from the very bottom of the pile.

"Lay off me, you thunderin' idiots," the voice came again.

"Don't you try any funny work, when we let you up," Cricket warned. "Hey, some one take his foot out of my ear."

"I'd like a foot taken out of my mouth," Casey Jones entered his complaint.

"Get off of him, all of you," Judith began to storm at them.

She began to pull and tug at the pile, getting an ear here, a nose there. Yells greeted her efforts, that were seconded by those of Marvel, who, urged on by Judith, joined the fray.

"Get off my eyebrow," the voice boomed again, and then, with a final heave, the newcomer was on his feet, squaring off in the gloom and yelling:

"That's a pretty way to treat a friend! Come on and fight it out like men. Danged if I'd ever come over to help you out if I knew that I was to be treated like a pirate."

"Why——" and Cricket was so amazed that he was unable to finish.

"Yes, it's me, Old Jeed, starved, worn out with watchin', waterless and foodless and——" The man began to rehearse his wrongs.

"You old coot——" And they all fell upon him again.

"Where's Boston?" was Cricket's first coherent query.

"Right over in the bushes, with a rifle trained on this patch, and if I raise the long yell, he'll let loose, promiscuous-like."

"Tell us——"

"Twenty of them came an' got the herd. They had long range rifles, so we had no show. But we followed orders, pretended to run, then kept the herd in sight. We've waited for you to come back, but you didn't come. So last night I crept up to their camp fire and heard what they've been up to. We didn't dare show ourselves during the day. We did not know all that had happened you, for I had to get away before I heard much, except that all of you were marooned out in this danged slough, Cricket. So we planned to wait till dusk and then scout around this place till we could make sure that there wasn't some way to get to you. We planned to wait till they were gone, if we had to, then get out to you on a raft or something," Old Jeed explained.

"There's a scow that they used as a ferryboat, but they drew it back to that other shore," Andy Tice told Jeed.

"So we skulked around in the late afternoon. We found signs of where a hoss came down to that place where we found the canoe. That hoss was rode out of there fast durin' the night, from what the sign tells. Well, we saw that canoe and grabbed her. Then we waited till dusk and—well, here I am," the old man said.

"Well, you've done a stroke of work to-day. You two got your hosses and outfits?" Cricket asked anxiously.

"Yes. The hosses are in good condition, too. We just loafed along behind that herd of cattle and was lucky in finding some grass that the cattle missed. Those devils seem to take it for granted that they don't have to make the cattle trail fast or far in a day. They think that you are cooped up here to stay. The older outlaws want just to leave you here. Some of those younger coyotes, and especially Arizona, want to come back for the girls. I'd have taken a shot at him, only Cricket said that we were to keep the herd in sight and not to start anything big till we all got together again," Old Jeed concluded.

"You followed orders and lucky for us that you did, old-timer. Now we've got that canoe and two hosses. We'll get to land, somehow, and then——" Cricket began.

"We'll smash that outlaw crowd flat," Casey Jones voiced their sentiments.

"They're a hard lot, boys," Jeed warned against too much confidence. "We'll have to make an easy start, but we'll sure finish strong."

"Have they all left the vicinity of the slough?" Cricket asked Jeed.

"No! They've left three men over at that scow landing, to make sure that you don't come after that scow, I suppose, till the herd is well on its way. They started it off toward the West, and Boston thinks that they're going over toward the Pot Hole country. He was over there with a posse once, and the posse cut through this section, so he thinks that they've headed the herd that same way this time," Jeed informed him.

"Our first move is to get word over to Boston," Cricket decided. "One of us will paddle Jeed over again. Jeed, you and Boston go around to where those three devils are watching that ferry landing. I'll go back across with Jeed. You other fellows watch. When you see a little handful of fire, come on over—two of you, in this canoe, that one of you'll fetch back to this side, after taking me over to where Jeed and Boston will start from. If our plans work out, we'll have those three side-winders over there and their hosses. With five hosses we ought to be able to do something. Get in, Jeed—no rest for sinners to-night. All of our hopes rest on this eggshell of a canoe, so be careful. When we get through with that canoe here, it can be carried across the island."

Jeed and Cricket, at once, got into the canoe and started back across the dark slough. Once across, Boston was in-

formed of all that was to be done, and Cricket went back across. Next he returned with Teaser Rines to paddle the canoe across to the main Bar C party, after Cricket had gone with Jeed and Boston.

"Well, good-by," Teaser said to Cricket. "We'll be right with you when we get the signal."

Then Cricket got the little party started on the way to make the round of the slough. The night was very dark. The moon would be late, and clouds had covered the heavens so that there were no stars to aid them. But Jeed and Boston had been over the ground once and did not err.

"We'll light down here," Boston advised, after an hour of steady plodding by the horses. They tied the two equines to shrubs, and crept forward afoot.

Soon Boston and Jeed had guided Cricket to a place where, looking over a low ridge, they could see the glimmer of the small fire kept by the trio of outlaws.

"They're cooking some grub. That makes it dead certain that I'm goin' to capture them. I want that grub," Cricket whispered, as they crept in closer still.

"Listen!" Jeed warned, and then he put his head back and gave forth the long howl of a hunting lobo wolf. So perfect was the imitation that Cricket found his spine chilly, as Jeed ended the call in a lingering quaver.

The men at the fire leaped to their feet, glaring about.

Their hosses snorted and stamped.

"That's what I wanted, to locate those hosses," Jeed whispered.

Cricket felt for and found a large stone. Getting partly erect, he hurled it off to one side. The stone, rolling and bounding, made considerable noise. The outlaws at the fire started toward the direction of the noise, one of them shouting:

"That's him. I heard him runnin' away——"

They leaped off toward where the stone had gone. At once, the three friends advanced stealthily. They gained the last bit of cover before reaching the fire, just as the three outlaws came back, talking and cursing at their inability to see the wolf.

"He may stampede our hosses," one of them was saying, when three forms emerged from the belt of darkness outside the fire glow and advanced, while the triple order rang out:

"Hands up!"

Taken entirely by surprise, and seeing the steadiness with which the six-guns, trained on them, were held, the outlaws at once thrust up their hands. In a few moments they were disarmed and bound, lying beside their own fire.

"Now for some grub," Cricket said, then he thought of the others and refrained. But Jeed, searching the effects of the outlaws, found that all of them had full bags, with plenty of bacon, beans, sugar, salt and coffee.

"Well, I guess that this is about nigh luxurious livin'," said Jeed, as he proceeded to eat the crisp bacon that the outlaws had already fried. Warmed-over beans were in a skillet near the fire; and there was fresh coffee.

"You hombres sure made ready for company," Jeed warned them, then he said to Cricket, in a meaning aside:

"Do these hang with all the rest?"

"I think so," was the answer.

"Sure, now, that the gang's all taken, I think that it will be a big hanging bee," Boston joined in the hazing of the outlaws. Now, for the first time, one of them spoke:

"Are the other members of the gang all caught?"

"She was a big fight, but the militia got them all," Cricket prevaricated.

"The Tawltons and Arizona Shallum and Dernold are all wiped out," Boston added to the story.

The outlaws were silent then. The three friends finished their meal with enjoyment and in a hurry. Then they went through the gap in the ridge to the scow landing. They made a small fire, and then set about getting the scow into the water.

"Could we pole her over?" Cricket wondered. "The ferry rope's gone."

"We can pole her till she won't go any farther. Then they can fetch those off the island by canoe, and meet the scow. That will speed things up a whole lot," Boston suggested.

They got the scow into the water, and found poles that they trimmed off large near-by shrubs.

Before they were ready to push off, they heard the canoe coming, and in it were Teaser Rines and Andy Tice.

"It's all right, boys! We've got the scow and three prisoners," was the news with which Cricket cheered them. "Go right up behind that ridge, and mount guard over those chuckwallas, Teaser. Andy, help us pole this old ark. We'll tow the canoe and use her to get to the island with, if the scow won't make it through that band of ooze closer to the island's shore."

Teaser Rines departed to mount guard over the prisoners, and the other three started to pole the scow across the lane of open water. When they struck the band of ooze closer to the island shore, they found that the scow could not be forced through it, except at a very slow pace.

"You two stay here. I'll go ashore an' get some one. I can make trips through that ooze and back fairly quick," Cricket told them. "They'll have to come, one at a time, but we'll make it."

Cricket left in a moment in the canoe. Ashore, he found the other Bar C men waiting hopefully. He told them what had occurred and started to take them out to the scow. One by one, he ferried them through the thick ooze belt along the shore, to the heavy scow waiting there in that lane of clear water.

"Springs in this lane keep the ooze washed off to one side," Jeed told Cricket. "Good place to fill our canteens before we leave the slough."

The girls were brought over. Then, last of all, The Poco Kid, now weak but able to stand being moved.

Once ashore, Cricket breathed more freely. Again they were a united group. They had five horses and three rifles captured from the bound outlaws held near the fire. A fair meal for all was cooked from the supplies of the outlaws; and then a council of war was held, with the outlaws dragged off to one side, where they could not hear.

Cricket listened to all the suggestions, then asked Judith her opinion:

"You've got a lot in that herd, Judith. Let's hear your side of it. I got us into a bad fix——" he began.

"You did the best that you knew how. That's all that any one can do," said the girl, going to his side and taking his hand. "Cricket, I put all of my interests in your keeping. If we lose those cattle, all right. If we get them back, all right. You're a man and will do a man's part—a woman can't ask for more."

"You put *all* your interests in my hands?" he asked, not letting go of her hand that he had seized when she had extended it to him in encouragement.

"Well," she said with a smile, "all of my *cattle* interests——"

"Shucks—still business——" Cricket remonstrated.

"Yes, I'm a business girl—going to be a doctor, you know," she reminded him.

"To get down to cases," Cricket resumed. "What're we goin' to do now? I'm going straight ahead. These three buzzards we'll walk out into the open and turn loose, without any arms. We can't be bothered with them, and I won't shoot them cold turkey. We've

got detailed descriptions of them and the law may get them later, when we get to where the law lives. I'm goin' after that herd in the morning. Five of us are going. The rest stay right here, with what grub we'll leave you and The Poco Kid. We'll go forward five days, and if we don't get that herd then, we'll come back."

This was agreed upon, and then they all turned in to get what rest they could. Cricket had them up with the dawn. They looked over the outfits captured from the three outlaws and found them good. Their horses, too, were hardy beasts, fit for the trail. One big piece of luck came to them—a beef from Judith's herd that they found had been left behind in a near-by trough of land, a stray from the passing, stolen herd. They heard its bawling and drove it to the camp. There they killed the animal, and so made sure that those whom they would leave behind had food, as the surplus from the beef could be smoked and preserved.

The last thing that they did was, by a united haul, to pull the scow onto land and turn it up, with a log propped under one gunwale, thus turning it into a low shelter, that would keep off possible wind and rain. A fire in front of it to reflect heat back, and blankets from the store of the captured outlaws, that they left for The Poco Kid, made the camp reasonably cozy.

With a final farewell, Cricket, Jeed, Boston, Andy Tice, and Teaser Rines rode away, leaving the extra Bar C men with the girls and The Kid. The five took the three outlaws with them, all the while giving them the impression that the main body of the Tawltons had been captured and taken toward the settlements by the militia, ordered out on information given by Old Jeed.

The trail of the herd lay, broad and plain, before them. It was a day old. The cattle were being pushed, but not at a desperate rate.

"They don't seem to have any wagon," Cricket said to Jeed.

One of the captured outlaws spoke up: "They've got pack hosses with plenty of grub. Don't fear about that part."

"All right! That is information that we appreciate a whole lot," Cricket answered him. "Now, hombres, we're turnin' you loose. Don't go back to that scow landing, for they've got orders to shoot to kill. You'll walk and walk straight away from where you now are at."

"Which we sure will," their spokesman agreed. "We're through, if we can make it out and get away."

They watched the three crestfallen and thoroughly dispirited men trudge away, afoot.

Now Cricket and his four friends turned their horses back to the herd trail again. The horses were in good condition, and they put the miles behind them rapidly.

"Figuring that they pushed those cattle twenty-five miles since we saw the trail fog, as they passed behind these ridges back of the scow landin'," Jed told them, "and they started early this morning, we've got fifty miles to go before we get close to them. How does that figure, Cricket?"

"Well, let's see what's in these hosses. I'm goin' to play this right straight. If we tire out the hosses, all right. I want just one thing—to get in shootin' distance of that crowd, and then I'll take my chances."

He led the way at a smart lope, that covered the ground with fair speed. They were too well versed in the ways of horses to rush madly into this new venture. The long, swinging lope spelled safety and better progress, in the end, than would a high lope or broad-reaching gallop.

They rode silently for hours, pausing only to blow their horses and tighten saddles.

CHAPTER XXX.

WITH THE HERD AT NIGHT.

I GUESS that we got that herd this time," Arizona rejoiced to Dernold, as they sat at the camp fire of the outlaw outfit. "Been gone two days—not a sign of anything wrong."

"Puttin' them on the island in that slough was what did the trick, Arizona. Got over yearning after that tow-headed girl yet?" he asked.

"No, but cattle are worth more than wimmin, just as you said."

Dernold laughed, as he replied: "Well, yes! You can always find wimmin, but a herd of cattle like this won't ever come to hand again, in this degenerate age of ours."

"Who's on first night guard with the cattle?" Arizona asked.

"Jabe Tawlton, and a danged useful cuss he is," Dernold said, dropping his voice. "We'll dump him when the herd's where we can handle it alone."

Arizona chuckled at this joke. They mingled, then, with the other outlaws, and indicated men for the later guards. Two-hour shifts had been agreed upon. One of Jabe's sons was with the remuda, off in a draw about half a mile from the main camp.

"We've been up a lot lately. We'll sleep to-night and let the Tawltons guard the cattle," Arizona told Dernold, who agreed to this plan.

Out with the herd, Jabe Tawlton rode his rounds, with another man to meet him every time that he circled. The night had closed in black and still. The tired cattle had bedded down on a little knoll, at the farther foot of which a draw led down to where the remuda was grazing.

Out of the darkness came a man, riding to meet Jabe, who spoke:

"That you, Katers?"

The oncoming man mumbled and grumbled unintelligibly. Jabe leaned over in the saddle. Oblivion descended upon him as Jeed's gun crashed against his temple at the end of a lusty sweep of the old-timer's still sturdy arm. Jeed eased the outlaw chief down by clutching his coat collar. The reins fell over the outlaw's horse's head in this maneuver. The cattle on that side stirred uneasily, but settled down from sheer weariness, as Jeed began to croon to them as he alighted and bent over the captured outlaw.

Binding the outlaw with his own belt and taking his guns and knife, Jeed began to sing the signal song agreed upon:

"Good night, ladies, we're goin' to leave you now."

At once, another rider came out of the gloom, from the direction of the draw, down which was the remuda. And, from the other side of the herd, came another song:

"Buffalo gals, ain't you comin' out to-night?"

"I guess that Old Casey Jones got his man, too," Cricket whispered to Jeed. "Did this wolf give you any trouble?"

"Only had to swing my gun once onto his solid ivory dome."

So far, all's well. We'll take these hombres down that draw. I found the remuda man asleep and have got him tied up. I think that, in a half an hour, we'll be ready to talk turkey to those devils in camp," Cricket said.

Leaving the herd without a guard, the two dragged the insensible outlaw down the draw and placed him close to the one whom Cricket had captured. In a few moments they were joined by Casey Jones and the other two Bar C men. Now a consultation was held. The three prisoners were left bound, far apart, so that they could not lie back to back and work on each other's bonds. Then the Bar C men rode their horses quietly off into the night again.

Arizona, with the instinct of the lone wolf, did not sleep well. He raised himself on his elbow. The outlaws

were playing cards by the flickering glow of a small fire.

"Guard been changed yet?" he asked.

"No, he ain't rode in yet," one of the Tawltons growled.

"That's queer! How many hosses on that long line stretched between the trees?" Arizona asked.

"Enough for the night guards," was the answer.

"Pack hosses tied safe to that hitch-line?" Arizona demanded.

"Sure," came the answer shortly.

"All right—it seems all safe, but I'm uneasy."

"Get up and play cards, then; that's the way to pass the time," some one advised.

Then a long yell sounded, close at hand.

Amazed and stunned with surprise, the marauders saw a party of shooting men ride out of the gloom. One leaned over and slashed the hitch-rope to which the night horses and pack animals were tied. There was a stampede of horses and shooting men. The outlaws rushed to that edge of the camp where the raiders had disappeared in the gloom and, as they did so, the raiders, circling in the gloom and still yelling wildly, came back.

"They've got the rifles that were stacked by those packs," Arizona shouted, beside himself with rage as he jerked his guns out. A bullet cut into his arm, and he let his guns fall. Dernold fell aside—a burning pain across his breast. The other outlaws scattered into the darkness.

Silence engulfed them.

They waited for the expected attack and charge home of militia or cowmen, but none came. Arizona, recovering from the pain of his wound first and getting his wits working smoothly again, spoke:

"Dernold, did they get you bad?"

"Bullet slash across the chest—in the flesh only," Dernold answered, hoarse with rage. "They have set us afoot and got our rifles."

"And we're right in the open, too," Arizona replied.

"You'll stay there, too," a voice called from the outer dark.

"I'll send you somewhere else," said Arizona, jerking his gun and shooting toward the sound.

A crashing volley answered this shot. Arizona at once leaped to the camp fire and kicked it to bits. Then, a ring of flame seemed about them, and the outlaws yelled for mercy as they felt the sting of avenging lead. The fire ceased as suddenly as it had begun.

In the darkness the outlaws began to whisper to each other.

They accounted for all their number, but Arizona and Dernold.

"Wonder where Jabe is and that man with him and that man with the remuda?" they asked each other.

The night, silent and sinister, seemed threatening.

"Those two wolves, Dernold and Arizona, quit us," one of the lesser breed of wolves told the others.

"I'm through with this cattle-stealin' job," one of them announced, after a long, silent pause.

"Count me out, too. Old Gabriel Tawlton knew what he was about, when he quit back at that half-dry lake. He told us to keep out of Jabe's scheme; but us younger fellows wouldn't listen to wise Old Gabriel, and now see what we're up against."

Out in the darkness, Arizona and Dernold, listening intently, heard this proof that their sway over the younger Tawltons was at an end.

"Arizona, I'm going to get away from this gang. I've got my hoss staked out in a little sink-hole nook that I found, before we reached this camp. We'll make it and make a get-away," Dernold whispered. Arizona agreed to this, and the two wounded outlaws crept away together.

Meanwhile, the Bar C quintet, with their horses all together in the draw where the remuda was, waited for the dawn. The cattle were still on the bed ground. A man rode around them, while the others watched at a distance down the draw—ready to take to the saddle at the first call of emergency.

The dawn came to gild the horntips of the cattle. They were routed off the bed ground by Jeed and Boston, while the others rode toward the late outlaw camp. It was deserted. Afar they saw the surviving outlaws, afoot, marching disconsolately away.

"I wish that we had enough of a force to take those buzzards to a town where they've got a jail that would hold them," Cricket said. "But we can give the sheriff of this county information enough, so that he can bring a raidin' gang in these regions and root them out of their holes later on. Now we've got that herd, and we'll take Jabe Tawlton and those other two along as prisoners, as proof of the breed that hangs on in this country to harass honest folks passin' through."

"I guess that it's goin' to take all that we can do to drift those cattle back to that slough—that's the next place where we can get water that's any good. We can water them in that clear lane at the scow landing, a hundred head at a time, with riders to keep them from getting off to one side into that black ooze," Jeed said. "We've got a restive remuda, and those cattle have been misused, till they might take to stampedin' at their own shadows nights. I guess that it will take three days to get back to that scow landing."

"We'll make better time by letting three men stay with the cattle," Casey Jones advised. "Let the other two take the remuda and put out for that scow landing on the slough, mount the other men, and ride back, leaving all hosses not wanted at the slough. We've got grub on those pack hosses that we took away from those buzzards, so we're all right on that score. The men, who take the remuda back, can take these prisoners, bound fast to hosses. They can make it back in a day. We'll rope out some of the remuda hosses and pack the saddles and blankets that those outlaws left behind, as well as our own, on the spare hosses. Those outlaws might come back and we want to clean up, so that they won't get anything to help them, if they do."

These plans were put into operation.

And within two hours, the scene of the late outlaw camp was deserted by everything except a coyote, who came to sniff for chance bits of food left behind.

About midnight, the returning remuda came to the place where the scow was turned up at the landing on the slough. Happiness reigned, as Cricket, in charge of the returned remuda, told of the events of their trip. The pack horses were relieved of their burdens, at once. Now each of the men had a full outfit and soon after dawn, after a short rest for men and horses, saddles were put onto enough horses to carry Cricket and his men back toward the herd. Poco Kid was now able to mount a guard, and one extra man was left with him and the girls.

Two days later the herd rounded in and was watered in the landing place before the upturned scow, and plans were made for getting the outfit in motion toward Hanseburg again.

"Now, these cattle are gaunted," Cricket had to admit. "If we hadn't had such opposition, we'd have brought them through slick as grease. But, as it is, we've got to drive slow and let them take on weight, after we get them out of these hilly regions."

This was agreed upon, and a start was made, the herd going around the slough.

As they passed the place where the canoe had been pulled ashore by Jeed,

Jabe Tawlton saw something floating in the ooze. He pointed it out, and it was dragged ashore. It proved to be the body of Jabe's son, Jerry Tawlton, now rising after having been in the ooze for days. They searched it and, in one of the pockets of his coat, found money, a ring, and a watch. They showed them to Jabe. His eyes glowed as he said:

"Those were used by Bullis. Jerry got them off him in some way, but who killed my son?"

"None of us, Jabe, man to man," Cricket told him.

"I think that I see a light," Jabe said, sadly hanging his head. "Bullis was overheard tryin' to get Jerry to come back after him. I warned Jerry not to do it. Jerry always ran that canoe—it was a fad of his. Jerry went back that night to meet Bullis. They came over in the canoe. That watch and ring show that they were together. And I've got a hunch that they had a fight. Bullis killed my son. And I'll kill him, if I ever get a chance."

"Maybe Bullis didn't do it," Cricket suggested.

"My hunch is good," the man replied.

CHAPTER XXXI.

A CRUSHING BLOW.

AFTER leaving the slough, Jabe Tawlton's spirit seemed broken. He meekly accepted whatever was offered him and seemed thankful for any kindness done. Often he told Cricket that Jerry was his favorite child, and that the death of the young man had broken him completely. The other two captives remained docile enough, once Jabe had let down the flag of his formerly dauntless spirit.

The herd trailed slowly forward. They found scant grazing, although the water was fair. The cattle hardly held their own in flesh, but quieted down into an orderly herd again.

There were no further alarms in the sand hill section. And they saw no one outside of their own company as they journeyed. Cricket scouted the land out ahead each morning, returning to the herd about mid-forenoon.

Once he induced Judith to leave the herd with him and let Jeed act as cook for that day. All during the morning ride they were quiet and kept away from the big question that was between them.

On the way back to the herd, however, after discovering a pond hole that held water, Cricket tried to get Judith to say that she would not go East, after her cattle were sold. But the girl refused to give him the reply that he wished for.

"This trip is all business," she insisted, suddenly setting spurs to her horse and leaving him for a gallop. He accepted the challenge, and they raced back toward the herd.

Toward the edge of the sand hill section, the grazing improved and they made slower marches. The time had passed rapidly, so Cricket hardly realized that they had been ten days over the time planned on for the whole drive.

"I'll say that, when this outfit drifts out of this section into settled regions and the tame folks see us—bearded, dirty, with clothing torn to rags, those girls with faces browned and boots about whipped out, they'll think that a band of savages have appeared out of the howlin' wilderness," Cricket joked with the Bar C crowd one night, as they were looking for the edge of the grasslands proper to appear on their left front, the next two marches ahead.

"We sure look like the folks from the forest," Casey Jones had to agree, "but I'm not goin' to shave till we get into a town again. And, then, I'll have a shave, neck shave, bobbed hair, perfume, pomade, and marmalade, all at once and then repeat."

"Queer that we didn't see any more of Arizona and Dernold. I thought that they'd try to stir up another gang of varmints against us," Teaser Rines offered.

"I don't think that it's queer. I think that it's a blamed good thing," Jeed said, stroking his rippling beard. "Think that they'll come again, Jabe?" he asked.

"No," their broken-spirited captive said; "they've got enough."

"I wish that I could believe it," Cricket said.

He left in the morning to scout the trail ahead, asking Judith to accompany him. She consented again, much to his satisfaction. They rode along, laughing and eager to see the end of the sand hills. Two hours later they left them, and came into a broken country, with steep-sided draws and patches of grazing lands between. They rode down one of these draws, and Cricket called to Judith's attention the fact that two horsemen had been down that place not long before.

Judith leaned over to verify his sign-reading. They rounded a bunch of boulders in the bed of the draw.

"Quick—up with them!" came the sharp command.

Cricket jerked erect, to find Arizona Shallum and Kite Dernold facing them, guns out.

"You didn't think that we'd take a lickin' and not get even?" Arizona drawled.

"We ain't that kind, Bursand," Dernold spoke harshly. "I said that I'd get you for hittin' me that way back in Gypsom."

"I guess—I guess—that it's cases for me," Cricket faltered, his hands up. "You'll let the girl go back——"

"Her? Go back—not any," Arizona snarled.

"Keep back, Judith," Cricket whispered, as Arizona swung down to come get his guns. As Arizona's feet touched the soil, Cricket's spurs were roweled into his horse, that leaped, thus spoiling the aim of the first bullets that they threw at him. Cricket's hand moved like lightning. His first shot was thrown over his shoulder and caught Arizona's horse, that started to buck. Cricket's second shot found Dernold's middle, just over the belt buckle, and he sagged forward.

Cricket swung under the neck of his plunging horse and let drive at Arizona, just as the gunman got his horse down onto four feet again and steadied for a clean shot. Cricket felt the ball that hit his shoulder that showed from under the neck of the horse. Then Arizona, standing in his stirrups, pitched forward and Dernold, throwing a final futile shot into the air, followed him. Cricket slid from his horse. Judith, at his side in a flash, got his head into her lap and began to kiss him:

"Cricket—oh, Cricket——" she said.

"I'm not hurt bad—flesh wound," he spoke softly. "Kiss me again."

But she got up and blushingly drew off to one side. Cricket got up and examined the two dead outlaws. He found a near-by hollow and piled rocks over the bodies, after rolling them into the natural grave.

"This story will have to be told. They started it, and I had to finish it; but no cowman's jury will ever find an indictment against me on their account," Cricket told Judith, as they rode away.

"No, I can tell what I saw and that will support your story."

"Say, Judith, when you kissed me back there, was it strictly business?" Cricket asked her.

"No," she said blushingly. "That is—that's not a fair question. No matter what I say it will be incriminating."

"All right, we'll wait till the drive ends——" Cricket told her.

"Then I'll be going East to college," Judith remarked.

"All right, if you can," Cricket said,

with a new note of mastery and confidence. Judith looked at him aslant, and then looked away before he could catch her eyes straying from the strict path of business.

"Well, that was a good mornin's work," Jeed told them, when they had returned to the herd with their report.

Six days later they swung across the big grazing section northwest of Hanseburg. Now they were in territory where they had to keep again within local restrictions. News of their arrival in settled parts was flashed along the lines of communication. When asked for news of their trip, all of the party were silent, at Cricket's request.

"I want to see if that railroad has any more moves against us," Cricket told his people. "Let some one else talk about this."

Two days later they drifted the herd through a long lane, past some corrals and into a big pasture, where Cricket intended to hold them till he could see about shipping arrangements. He lacked ready funds, but the cattle were security for grazing charges, he knew. The packs, saddlery and war bags were parked close to the corral. Poco Kid, now fully recovered, held the remuda in another smaller pasture, close at hand.

"Now I'll drift into town, arrange for grub and anything that all of you may need, get prices, arrange for cars and so on. In a couple of days, we'd ought to be out of here and on our way home," Cricket remarked.

"If Lady Luck don't sunfish on us again," Jeed said.

"We got her tied fast," Cricket rejoiced. His heart was feeling light again. He looked at Judith, who laughed with the old ringing lilt in her voice, as she pointed to Marvel, who was gazing wistfully toward The Poco Kid and his remuda.

"Wonder if that's anything from Lady Luck?" said Casey Jones, pointing toward a group of approaching riders.

They watched the newcomers intently. There were a half dozen of them. Their leader rode right up to Bursand and extended his hand—in it was a paper bearing ominous-looking red seals.

"Your name is Bursand, sir?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," was Cricket's reply.

"Then this is service in a suit for this herd. The First National Bank of Hanseburg holds assignation of bill of sale on the cattle that you bought from Mr. Cronk at Gypsom. The time limit in the note has run out; and we attach the whole as surety for the claim," the speaker explained.

"You mean that you're taking our herd——" said Old Jeed, glancing at them wildly. Casey Jones and the other Bar C men grouped about Cricket and eyed the strangers threateningly.

"Yes, attached by authority of the superior court. Now, boys, don't start fightin' the court, because back of it is the State's militia and back of that the Federal army."

"We can lick 'em all," Casey Jones yelled.

"Bar C can lick anything," Jeed fairly shouted.

"Casey—Bar C men——" Cricket warned. "This is settled territory—we are under court rule. Mr.——"

"Corson, sheriff of Burr county, sir, at your service," the other replied.

"Mr. Corson, I yield to you and will go back to town with you. Men," he said to his friends, "stay with the herd. Don't start any trouble—but keep an eye on these cattle. If they move them, go right along and keep an eye on them. I'm on my way to town to hire a lawyer and see about this in a legal way, boys."

"Trust us, boss," came in a chorus. Judith and Marvel waved their hands at Cricket as he rode away with the officers.

"You're forgettin' something," Casey

Jones called, and, as they turned back, he pointed to the prisoners.

"Say, Sheriff Corson," Cricket said, "speakin' of law and order, we've got three coyotes back there that I forgot all about. I charge those three with cattle thieving, hoss thieving, and a lot of other crimes. One is Jabe Tawlton, the others are two of his men. Take them along to jail, and I'll make good on my charges formally when we get around to them."

Corson sent men back to get the three prisoners, and they were escorted to town by the posse.

CHAPTER XXXII.

"PUT HIM IN HERE!"

IN his private car on the spur from the main line to the Southern & Tidal, Gerald Klaspel, president of the Transcontinental Systems, looked across a dining table at Herschel Bullis, again the immaculately dressed man of affairs, shaven, perfumed, precise.

"Bullis, when I got in on my tour of inspection of the other side lines, I heard, through the regional newspapers, of the excitement over this trail herd that has been coming up the valley, so I thought that I'd stop over. Luckily I found you in town. I presume you're watching developments?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," Bullis replied. "I went into the region that the herd traversed, but,"—with a gesture of contempt—"they had gotten into trouble with men as hard as themselves—outlaws and horse thieves and the like. I got out and came back here to take legal measures against them."

"Legal measures? You know that I warned you to stick to legal means in fighting this attempt to break down our rate schedule's increase."

"Yes, and I've kept within the law, sir," Bullis replied.

Klaspel looked the other square in the eye, but Bullis looked aside.

"Look here, Bullis, I mean what I say—legal measures," Klaspel thundered.

"Yes, sir, legal, all the way, sir," Bullis said, now meeting his chief's eye firmly. Klaspel, reassured, listened while Bullis told a story, tinged to suit his own ends.

"So they got through finally, but will have to lose their herd?"

"Yes, Bursand gave notes on part of the cattle, buying from a neighbor, sir. The note was conditioned upon the arrival of the cattle ten days ago. They did not arrive. The note was bought by the First National Bank here, which will proceed to collect and may take Bursand's whole herd, sir. He has as a sort of partner a Miss Patterson, who has cattle in his herd. Under the law, she will be liable for her partner's losses, I am afraid," Bullis concluded.

"You are afraid?" Glaspel questioned him.

"Yes, sir," Bullis replied, with a hypocritical sniff.

"We have company funds in this First National Bank?" Klaspel asked.

"Yes, sir; they handle the company pay roll and accounts here. They will do as we say," Bullis informed him.

Klaspel again looked at his subordinate sharply. Just then a tap on the private-car window drew their attention, and a man outside made a certain sign to Bullis.

"A man whom I had watching the sheriff's office, sir," he said. "It means that the herd has arrived at the outer corrals. Bursand's cattle have been attached. Do you care to go down to the courthouse and see the end of it?"

"I think that I shall. I want to see this fellow Bursand," Klaspel replied, going out at once. Bullis' hired motor car was at the end of the spur. In it, they went to the courthouse, arriving just as the three prisoners were being taken to the jail office to be booked, and

Sheriff Corson and Cricket were entering the sheriff's office in a corner of the public structure.

Bullis and Klaspel followed the sheriff and Bursand into the sheriff's office. Wheeling, Cricket spied Bullis, and his face went white with anger.

"Son," the sheriff spoke kindly and firmly, "you're under the dome of a house of the law."

"I'll remember, sir," Cricket said steadily.

"Did you serve the papers?" Bullis asked, seeking to ignore Cricket.

The sheriff nodded and pointed to chairs.

"This is Mr. Gerald Klaspel, president of the Transcontinental Systems," Bullis introduced his chief.

Cricket sprang to his feet, his eyes blazing, and began to talk:

"Mr. Klaspel, I don't know if you're party to all that's taken place, but I'd hate to think so. Listen to me——" he began.

"He's half crazy," Bullis started to shut Cricket off, but Klaspel himself said quietly:

"I'd like to hear this young fellow talk. Go on, sir."

Cricket edged between Bullis and the door before he began to talk and then, bit by bit, he told briefly what had happened.

Several times Bullis tried to interrupt with claims of:

"He's lying. All a pack of falsehoods, don't take that in, sir."

Cricket replied: "My men will corroborate this, every word." Bullis protested. But Cricket went on, to the end. As he finished, Klaspel got up and walked across the room several times. Bullis made a sudden lunge for the door. Cricket's gun leaped up under his short ribs and he fell back, whining and blustering, in a hysteria of rage and baffled revenge.

Klaspel stopped his pacing as Cricket slammed the cringing man into a chair. Sheriff Corson turned to Cricket with one simple word:

"Thanks!"

"Bullis," Klaspel said, towering over the other, "we've trusted you to run this division. But I had a suspicion that all was not well two weeks ago. I've had our secret service working on this division since then. You're short in your accounts, and you've got this railroad in a bad hole with the fight against this herd of cattle. It will lose us plenty of good will. You were positively instructed to fight Bursand within the law. The letter in my files will prove it. Sheriff, lock this man up. I charge him with misappropriating company funds, and I will file a formal charge at once."

Sheriff Corson got up and put his hand on Bullis' shrinking shoulder. He led him out and turned him over to a deputy in the outer corridor. The deputy took him down the corridor to the hall leading to the jail cells. There he unlocked the place and went in.

"Cell room not plentiful," a deputy in there joked. "You'll have to put him in with some one."

"Put him in here," a muffled voice came from the cell right opposite. The inmate of that cell now looked out through the bars and could see whom the deputy had. The deputy laughed, unlocked the cell door, thrust Bullis into the cell, locked him in, and went away.

As they turned away, they heard Bullis plead:

"Not in here, please—any other cell but this——"

But they did not understand what that pleading tone meant and went out, laughing.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

"YOU WIN!"

IN the sheriff's office, Klaspel again faced Cricket and considered this firm-jawed, and now hard-eyed young man. Cricket was bearded, his cloth-

ing tattered, his hat battered. Yet his eyes had a flash and his shoulders a square-set appearance that the man had to admire.

Sheriff Corson watched the two and smiled inwardly.

"Bursand," Klaspel spoke firmly and crisply, "a big error has been made. I thought that we were right in fighting you, as you were attacking the rate schedule of a big railroad system. I thought that you were a bad man, stirring up trouble. Bullis, whom we trusted, so reported. And I gave him orders to meet you in all legal ways. But he has exceeded his authority and made a bad job of it all around. Now about this foreclosure on those notes, he told me about that. Of course, in law, you're beat."

"No, I'm not, sir," Cricket said, bouncing up and facing his opponent squarely and fairly. "The facts are that your own agent, Bullis, prevented delivery of those cattle on time and in condition fit to top the market. His plots did it, and he plotted while still your handy man. You can hire big lawyers and all that; but you can't blink away the fact that I drove a herd here and laid it down at a cost per head far under what you're charging and, if we had been let alone, we'd have got them here in fine shape, too. Now they're a bit off the top, I'll admit, sir."

"Bursand," and Klaspel's eyes twinkled; "I like your style. I see now that we can't afford to fight you cattlemen. Boy, I like you. We might law on those notes, but we won't. I'll buy them of this bank here, and I'll buy your cattle, at top price——"

"You'll do something else, mighty quick," Cricket retorted, firm and quiet now.

"And what's that, Bursand?" Klaspel asked, equally quiet and firm.

"I'm not asking a bribe or a keep-quiet settlement. But I want those rates revised downward, Mr. Klaspel. I'll admit that we'd rather ship by rail, at a fair, but not at a cutthroat price. You can't afford to buy the ill will of the cattlemen any longer, sir. Get down where we live, with those rates and——" Here Cricket hesitated.

"And what?" the other prompted him.

"You can have my cattle, at the top of the market, for spot cash. And, as for those notes, with the money that I get for the cattle, I can pay them and have a fine profit besides."

"Bursand, you win! The rates will be revised, and all the cattle that have been shipped by rail this year will be figured at the old rates. I'll have rebate checks mailed from Chicago as soon as I get back and the auditors can figure it all out," Klaspel heartily declared.

"Then we're through fighting," Cricket said, answering his handclasp. "Sheriff, I've got a lot to tell you that will please you," and Cricket told Corson about Dog Hole, the Cabin Island Slough retreat of the Tawltons, and all other information of value to the law in connection with the trail drive. He told him, too, where to find the bodies of Arizona and Dernold.

"Both bad uns," the sheriff said. "You'll never be tried on any charge in connection with that trail drive. I couldn't get a jury that would convict you of anything, after the way you won in this cattle-rate matter."

A cry of terror reverberated through the building. Then, a scurrying of feet told of some unusual event. They went out into the corridor to find deputies returning from the jail. The sheriff asked what was wrong.

"Bullis is killed. We put him in with another prisoner, and he choked him to death and then went delirious. That was him yelled," one man replied.

"Who was in the cell with Bullis?" the sheriff asked.

"Jabe Tawlton," came the answer.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

STRICTLY BUSINESS.

THREE days later, the Bar C crowd was quartered in the Cattleman's Retreat, the best hotel in Hanseburg, enjoying life. In the business parlor of the hotel, Cricket and Judith met. In a corner, Marvel and Teaser Rines and The Poco Kid were chattering happily. So far Marvel Osgood had not made a choice between the two pals.

"Judith," said Cricket, handing her a check, "there's the check for your beeves. They've topped the market, and we've got a nice bonus above all expected profit. I'm goin' to divide mine with the men that helped us on the drive. Their loyalty made success possible."

"Yes, I realize that. With this money, all my own, I can——" she began.

She felt his hand come across to press her own down to the table at which they were sitting. She tried to draw her hand back.

"Judith," his voice was low and pleading, "it's the show-down."

"Yes, Cricket?" she said, her eyes holding his squarely.

"I want yes or no. You'll marry me when we get home, or not? Yes or no," he insisted.

"No," she replied firmly.

"Judith—all right. I suppose that you've got a right—to decide——" he began.

"I won't marry you when we get home——"

"Judith—why not?"

"Because, because—bend your head over so that I can whisper. There—because—well, I want to marry you right now, so that we can go home married to dad and ma——"Judith murmured.

"Cricket!" yelled Poco Kid, "she's took me, and Teaser's goin' to be the best man—hey, there! Break away—we thought that we was first, but we're last——"

Three days later, the Bar C crowd were on their way toward Gypsom. Arriving there, Cricket found the streets draped in honor of his homecoming, and the cattlemen organized to give the victorious crowd of cowboys and the two girls a rousing welcome.

First to greet Cricket and Judith were her mother and her father. Old Elias crushed Cricket to him in a bear hug, while Harley Gorst danced about waiting for a chance to get at the hero of the occasion. Gorst yelled:

"Patterson, I told you that you'd have to chaw beef on that boy some day. He beat us all."

"But the victory won't amount to much," Cricket hastened to remind him, over the shoulder of his delighted father-in-law, "unless we keep a few chuck wagons ready, all greased, and keep watch on the laws regarding trailin' cattle. We might want to drive another herd some time to show them that it can still be done and, as far as I'm concerned, I'll always drive my cattle, just as a reminder to all concerned that the old-time cowboy, that made the West, is still on deck and able to take care of himself and"—with a glance at Judith—"all that he calls his own."

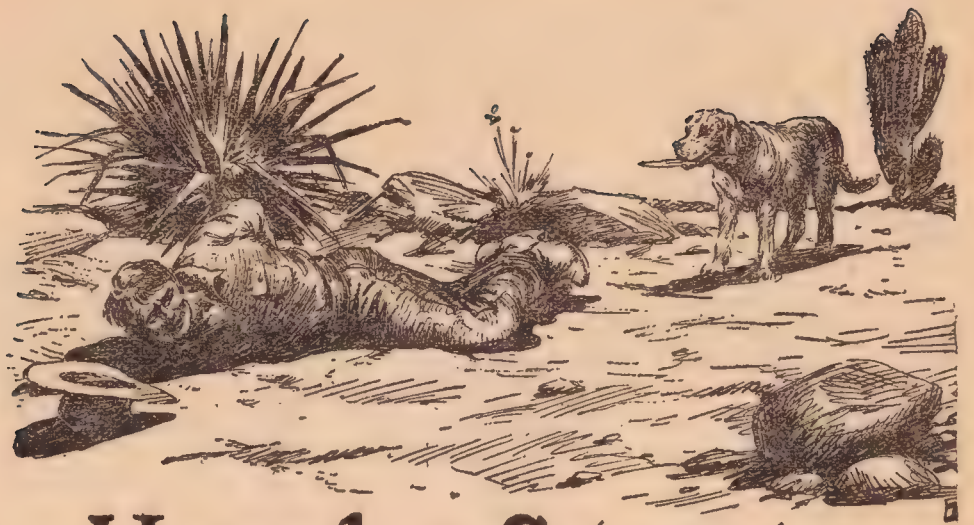
"What do you mean?" Elias asked.

"Just ask her—my wife," Cricket said proudly.

"Judith, I thought that that trail trip was just business," Elias said.

"It was, pa," Judith replied, coming into his wide-open arms with a bound. "The best business that a girl can do—finding the man that she really wants and then, taking him, when he offers, and pleads so hard that her heart won't let her say no."

THE END



Head Start

by Herbert Farris

Author of "Rustler Poison," etc.

THE song which "Careless" Jack was singing as he joined the long queue of miners and prospectors who were waiting for their mail in front of "Sandy" MacBane's general store and post office, accurately describes the young man's chief characteristic—shiftlessness.

"I gotta *place* to eat; I gotta *place* to sleep;
I gotta *plenty* good clothes to wear;
I gotta hat on my head, an' a-shoes on my feet,
An' a-what more need I care?"

For five years, the miners and prospectors of Suna had spoken of him as "plum' cultus," and in Alaska there are few epithets more opprobrious than that of "cultus."

"Hey, Careless!" shouted an acquaintance near the head of the waiting line, "All your mail—a big sack full—has been sent down to your cabin! I mean all but the important mail; you'll have to line up to sign for your registered letters!"

In spite of the cold—it was 50° below—the crowd laughed heartily. Out of their frosted, fur-rimmed parka hoods, the men in the line focused their eyes on Careless Jack. It was never too cold to enjoy a joke at the expense of the cultus one. And the point of the joke was well taken; for, in spite of the fact that the mail came over the trail but once a month, even with the lapse of such long intervals, Careless Jack Prince received only one letter—the lengthy, never-failing one from his mother.

So far as the crowd knew, this monthly letter which always came regularly, even though it was seldom answered, was from a sweetheart; some girl of his acquaintance, who steadfastly refused to forget him even if he had deliberately buried himself in the interior of Alaska. However, it was not this regular monthly letter which amused the crowd; it was the absurd suggestion that a great quantity of important mail was awaiting such a happy-

go-lucky, irresponsible person as Careless Jack Prince.

Jack Prince, who was last in line, joined in the laugh at his expense, and shuffled forward. The "good clothes," about which he had been singing, consisted of an ancient Mackinaw coat, out at one elbow and lacking two buttons; while the "hat on my head, an' a-shoes on my feet," consisted of a beaver-skin cap and the regulation moccasins. Altogether, he presented a disreputable appearance, which was redeemed in great part by his lean, honest face, from which a pair of frank blue eyes looked out smilingly at a world which was friendly enough in its tolerant way.

"You lazy, good-for-nothin' grub walloper! Why in thunder don't you get busy?"

Old Sandy MacBane had bustled from his tiny coop of a post office. The last of the monthly mail had been delivered, and he was alone in his store with the ne'er-do-well. Careless Jack grinned; he never resented any of the old postmaster's caustic remarks.

"Get busy at what?" Careless Jack continued to grin as he looked squarely into old Sandy's flashing gray eyes. "Anyhow, why should I get busy? I shot a moose last week, an' sold all of it to the road house, except a hind quarter that'll keep me in fresh meat for the rest of the winter."

"Get busy at what!" Sandy indignantly exclaimed. "You know well enough what I'm talkin' about. "You're in a minin' country; a real stampede is on, an' yet all you'll do is to hunt and trap a little. Why, boy, you ought to wake up! You've got a fine chance to make your everlastin' stake, an' two or three good hard weeks of work would do it for you. An' you've got a good dog, too; something that two dozen or more men around here would give their eye-teeth for. I wish I was twenty years younger—you wouldn't see me for the high spots!"

"Sandy," said Jack, assuming a serious demeanor, "you oughtn't to hang around a little village like this. Why don't you go to Wall Street, New York? They need men with lots of get-up an' go; men with ambition—like you."

Careless Jack pocketed his letter and left the old man spluttering. As he took the hard trail to his little cabin just below the village, his thoughts were of the stampede into the Kentna country. Only that morning he had heard a stranger—a loud-mouthed fellow, who seemed to be making a play to the gallery—noisily make an offer of two hundred dollars "for any kind of a dog." Yes, the stampede was on in earnest—for those money-mad, gold-crazy people who wanted to make the rush.

"Well, well, look who's here!"

It was Gyp, who, much to Jack's astonishment, had come to pay his master a visit. Gyp differed from the ordinary run of Malemutes, in that a strain of collie gave him distinction, quiet dignity, and a great love for the shiftless master who had raised him from a puppy. Yes, Gyp had come home, but how on earth had he managed it!

"How in thunder did you ever get away from old man Baylor!" Careless Jack had dropped to his knees, and was having a love feast with the dog. "Well, never mind, old-timer, I'll get that forty bucks in a few more days, an' then you'll be mine again for good an' all. How's the old skinflint been feedin' you, anyhow?"

They entered the cabin, Gyp sniffing eagerly at familiar surroundings. It was his old home, but, due to his master's shiftlessness, he had not seen it for nearly eight months. True, Careless Jack had not contemplated a separation extending over such a period of time, and it had all been occasioned by an accident that had happened to Gyp. At the outset of a hunting trip, Gyp had

cut one of his feet on a sharp piece of ice, and had been left behind with old man Baylor, who boarded dogs at his corral below Indian Town. His charge was not exorbitant—only five dollars a month—but upon his return, the master had been unable to pay the ten dollars due "the dog hotel keeper," so Gyp had been held for the debt. He was still being held, for old man Baylor steadfastly refused to deliver the dog to his master until payment was made in full.

"I've got to dig that money up pretty quick, son," said Careless Jack as he affectionately fondled the dog. "If I don't, it'll be so much I'll never be able to pay it, an' the old skinflint'll sell you for your board bill. If he was to do that——"

Old Baylor's horrible punishment, whatever it might be at the hands of his good-natured master, did not interest Gyp in the least. He was home again, and—so he firmly believed—home to stay. He eventually finished sniffing at familiar objects. Then he suddenly dropped to the floor, where he lay extended at full length, his head slightly cocked to one side, resting on his front feet, his brown eyes steadily regarding the master he adored.

"I'll bet *you* don't think I'm a cultus, good-for-nothing, do you, old son?" Careless Jack asked seriously. "If *you* ever get to thinkin' that I'm a cultus; then I *am* too much of a no-good to live! *You* think I'm all right, don't you, Gyp, old son?"

A sharp yelp, apparently of assent, was Gyp's reply.

"You sure do understand," said Careless Jack, lazily leaning forward to pinch one of Gyp's sensitive ears. "Dog-gone me, but you can say more with your eyes an' that yelp of yours, than most people can with their voice. Now, let's do your tricks—if you haven't forgotten 'em."

Gyp had not forgotten. With low whines of delight, he leaped through his master's circled arms; he sat up comically, Jack's fur cap perched well back on his head, and did a half dozen other simple tricks which had taken many months of patient training. Finally Careless Jack rattled a fry pan on the rusty stove.

"Time we was cookin', old son," he suggested, "an' remember you're the assistant cook." He pointed to his marble hunting knife, which lay on the floor where he had carelessly tossed it after building his breakfast fire. "Now fetch me the knife," he ordered, "an' I'll whittle some shavin's, an' then I'll cut us a big round off that hind quarter of moose I got last week. Come on, boy, fetch the knife."

Perhaps Gyp did not understand the whole of his master's speech, but a portion of it he understood fully. "Fetch the knife" was a command that was as familiar to him as "mush," "gee," "haw," and "come an' get it," the last being his invitation to dinner. Jack laughed at the care with which the dog gingerly took the keen-edged knife by its handle. Two years before, when he had been teaching Gyp to "fetch the knife," Gyp had picked it up by the blade and had cut his mouth.

"Once is enough for a dog with good sense, ain't it, Gyp, old son?" Jack took the knife, and leisurely began to whittle shavings, "It's just like a kid that gets burned once; he always dreads the fire after——"

The door had suddenly been thrown open, and in the doorway stood old man Baylor, a triumphant grin lighting up his thin, wrinkled face.

"I thought I'd find him here," he said in an accusing tone. "Now you just let me tell you something, Jack Prince. You can visit this dog all you want, down to my corral, but don't you ever go sneakin' him out any more! An another thing; if you don't get busy right away an' dig up his board bill,

I'm a-goin' to sell him. Dogs are bringin' might good money right now, an' you owe me nearly as much as he's worth in ordinary times. I can't afford to wait much longer, so you'd better get busy."

"If you sell Gyp, Baylor, I'll——"

"You won't do a cussed thing!" interrupted the old man. "Ev'rybody in this part of Alasky knows my system of doin' business, an' I'm not makin' any exceptions for the likes of you. Business is business, an' if this dog's board bill ain't paid, the highest bidder gets him. An' he's goin' to be sold durin' this stampede, too, while prices are good. You can make up your mind to that. He's nearly as cultus as you are, but I can get rid of him while this stampede's on."

It was almost an hour after old man Baylor had led Gyp away that Jack thought of his letter and opened it. Perhaps it was presentiment; possibly it was the fact that the letter was much shorter than usual, but in any case he had scarcely begun to read his mother's familiar handwriting when he realized that something had gone radically wrong at home. At last he came to the words which first set him quivering, then left him flushed with shame:

> And the doctor says that he will never be able to earn another dollar. It leaves us all so upset that we don't know just what to do. Your father was always so well and hearty, and, of course, while we have a few hundred saved up and there's the few dollars we get from renting the Brand place, still you know how expenses mount up. Harry is getting along so well in his school work. He was to enter high school next fall, and now it looks like——

Jack read no further at the time. His eyes were wet and the words of the letter blurred. But one thing he realized instantly. Responsibility had suddenly been thrust upon him. During the five years he had spent in Alaska, he had never given a moment's consideration to the fact that his father was growing old, that he was in duty bound to come to the rescue.

As his mother had said in the letter: "father was always so well and hearty," it was no wonder that the news of his stroke came as a distinct shock to the irresponsible eldest son. He picked up his cap from the floor where he had tossed it an hour before, and started for Sandy MacBane's store. It was apparent from his every movement, that in this shiftless, carefree youth, who never before had given a thought to the serious things of life, a sense of responsibility had been born.

At Careless Jack's entrance, Sandy MacBane looked up from one of his books of account in which he was making an entry. Ordinarily he would have paid no more attention to Jack Prince's entry than to that of an Indian. However, the fire of the boy's determination was tempering a character potentially strong, and the old man's interest was aroused. Here was no slouching, shuffling good-for-nothing; instead of the Careless Jack he had known for five years, Sandy was facing John Prince, rapidly coming into his own.

"Sandy," he said, looking the old man squarely in the eye, "I'm going on that stampede, an' I want an outfit—on credit."

"Well, now, let's see." Sandy was ready to yield at once, but felt that it was unbusinesslike without going through a certain amount of circumlocution.

"You know I've got a small stock an' I've got to watch the people I extend credit to pretty close; an' besides, I don't know what you've been doin' around here in the last five years to make your credit good. Time an' again I've offered you work—little jobs longshorein' an' the like—an' not once did you——"

"Never mind all that," interrupted the boy impatiently. "Do I get it or not?"

"Well, how much would you be wantin'?" Sandy temporized shrewdly.

"Not over seventy-five—I can get by on that."

"Not over fifty," said Sandy firmly. "You can get by on *that,* too. Fifty dollars goes a long ways in this store."

"I'll have to make it do, I guess, but—say, Sandy, how about a little cash advance? You see, my dog's in hock with old Baylor, an' I've just *got* to have a dog."

"It's better to have a dog, all right," Sandy conceded thoughtfully, "but plenty men'll be in this rush without dogs. Five dogs're better'n one, an' one's better'n none, but a man can haul his own outfit. No, I wouldn't stake you to a red cent in cash. When a man's lived like you have for the last five years," he concluded firmly, "I've got to be showed. This is more ambition than you've ever showed yet—this startin' on the rush into the Kentna—but I'm already strainin' a point to give you fifty dollars credit."

His new-found assurance had suffered quite a setback, but Careless Jack left the store and made a desperate attack on old man Baylor's small stock of generosity. But Baylor, too, was adamant. He turned a deaf ear to all methods.

"No," he said obdurately, "I got my lawful lien—Baylor pronounced it *lean* —on ev'ry dog I take to feed; an' boy, I mean to *lean* on it." He grinned happily at his little joke, but relaxed not one whit when it came to the business at hand. "You get yours," he added with finality, "when you pay for his keep."

There was nothing to be gained by further parley. Jack left old Baylor flushed with his victory, and went to The Caribou Bar. The saloon was the hang-out for the loud-mouthed individual who had made an offer that morning of two hundred dollars "for any kind of a dog." Jack found the stranger and briefly made him a proposition.

"It's like this," he said, after they had discussed the stampede from many angles; the condition of the trail, the number of men who would likely make the rush, and the percentage of chance that a man who owned a dog would have over the man who pulled his own load; "I've got a dog—a good one—but I owe forty dollars on him." He explained his predicament with Baylor. "Now if you'll dig up the forty, we can throw in together for the trip."

"You wouldn't sell him?"

"Not for any money."

"I don't know as I care to hook up with any pardners this trip," said the stranger ungraciously. He made a critical study of Jack's ancient Mackinaw coat. "I'm mighty careful about pickin' up pardners for the trail."

"I am too—as a rule," was Jack's quick retort. "I was willin' to make an exception in your case, but of course we'd better call it off now." John Prince was speaking now; not Careless Jack. "You see," he added apologetically, "when I made you the proposition, I thought you had forty dollars in cash. Sorry I mentioned the matter to you."

"Hold on, kid; hold on!" There was a hard glint in the stranger's cold eyes, which he tried to mask with an overcordial, thick-lipped grin of pretended admiration for Jack's retort. "You handed it to me pretty good, but at that, I was just kiddin' you." He laughed heartily as he laid a big restraining hand on Jack's shoulder. "Listen, boy," he went on cordially, "you can't make Jim Dolby sore with a good come-back. I kinda like your style, kid. What you say we go take a look at that dog?"

They started at dawn. Gyp, with a joyous yelp at his new-found freedom, tugged eagerly at his traces, perfectly willing, if demanded of him by his master, to pull the entire load. But Jack Prince did not demand anything so

unreasonable. Following Gyp, with a mittened hand on the sled's gee-pole, and a pull rope over his shoulder, he pulled steadily with the dog.

Behind the sled came Jim Dolby. Although garbed as a musher, in fur cap, parka and moccasins, he did not have the appearance of a hardened man of the trail. His parka hood was thrown well back, disclosing his heavy jowls which sagged over the collar of his blue flannel shirt; and, instead of the typical musher's thin waist, there was a telltale bulge at the front of his parka. Jim Dolby knew the life of the trail and when in condition was a hard man. Just now, however, he was "all flab." In his hands he held one end of a light seven-foot pole, the other end of which was buried in the tarpaulin cover of the load on the sled. Theoretically, he was supposed to be pushing with the pole, but Dolby had very soon discovered that the man and dog ahead of the loaded sled were quite capable of hauling it without his assistance.

"Just like a freight train passin' a tramp."

Dolby's brief muttered speech came shortly after they had passed a withered little old man of the snows, who was pulling his small outfit without dogs. He had pulled his sled from the hard-beaten trail that the faster outfit might pass; had saluted them briefly as if the economy of speech employed might save his strength for the wearisome miles that lay ahead of him. Jack, glancing back, saw the old fellow had made no attempt to draw his loaded sled back to the trail, but stood gazing after them wistfully.

"I'm mighty sorry for these old-timers," said Jack thoughtfully, his face half turned back to Dolby. "To pull like that, without a dog, is heartbreaking. One good seventy-five pound dog like Gyp here, that can pull his three to four hundred pounds on a good trail, is sure worth his weight in gold."

"The devil with the old-timers," growled Dolby from behind the sled. "They got no brains. If they had, they wouldn't be on a stampede like this without a dog. What chance they got?" he demanded arrogantly. "But take us, now, with this Gyp dog—if he's as good as you say he is—we'd ought to average our three miles an hour, an' get up there in plenty time to grab us off a good claim. Brains, if you've got 'em, is the only way to get ahead. Always use your head, kid, use your head."

Jack surged away on the pull rope, but made no reply. Necessity had made him the trail companion of this fellow for a few days, but once their outfits were landed in the Kentna country, he and Gyp would go it alone. In return for the forty dollars which Dolby had paid to old man Baylor, Jack was to sled Dolby's outfit upriver, and there the matter ended. And this, Jack recalled with growing exultation, as the days passed and Dolby's intolerable disposition became more and more apparent, was thoroughly understood between them.

They reached their goal at last, and found a small tented village made up of almost two hundred men. When they first came upon the scene, men seemed to be rushing aimlessly here and there, careless of destination, excitedly busy at something. A goodly number, evidently men who had already staked and prospected their ground and accordingly knew what they were about, had paired off to whipsaw lumber for sluice boxes to be used in the spring.

One enterprising fellow, who laughingly told them that he had reached the camp too late to stake anything worth while, had at once gone into business. A cook by trade, he had set up his tent by the side of the trail and was selling hot doughnuts and coffee—two doughnuts and one cup of coffee for one fifty.

"You'd be surprised how they buy," he ran on happily. "Not one man in a

hundred on the trail knows how to cook anything but sour dough hot cakes, bacon and beans, so they're all keen to buy my sinkers. As soon as you find out there's nothing doing for you in this camp, come see me before you hit the back trail—I'll pay you good money for your flour."

With a careless shrug for the information vouchsafed them by the cook, Jack spoke to Gyp, and they were off again. Beyond earshot of the cook, he consulted with Dolby.

"What do you want to do?" he asked. "I suppose you know that most of these men are chechahcos, like that cook. A greenhorn always believes everything is taken long before it is. Which way?"

"Well," said Dolby, considering ponderously. "It's all a gamble anyway. Let's mush on till we run out of stakes; then'll be time enough to stop an' talk it over. As for this bunch," he concluded, with a wave of his hand at the hustling men who rushed by them on all sides, "half of 'em 'll be millin' around here till spring—long after all the good ground is staked an' recorded. Let's mush straight ahead."

They left the little mining camp behind them, climbed steadily for hours; then dropped down into a sheltered basin almost circular in shape. A creek cut through the center of the basin and found its outlet in a narrow cañon which they determined to explore later. After following the creek for a way, they pronounced it "too bouldery" for sluicing to be profitable, conceding that the values were there. Still, there was the creek's source to be explored, and the cañon offered even better possibilities.

"Right here's where I make *my* camp," said Dolby, after quickly sizing up the country. "Just throw my stuff off here, an' I'll take a look at that cañon to-morrow. You've got the dog to haul your stuff—suppose you prospect the head of the creek."

Jack shrugged. He was much pleased that he would soon be alone with Gyp; yet Dolby was taking all the best of it. There was a far better chance of finding gold in the cañon, which was one of nature's sluice and riffle boxes combined, and, judging from what he could see of the creek's source, the prospect there was none too promising.

"Oh, well," he said after considering the matter for a moment, "it looks like you're hogging the best chance on me, but—gold is where you find it."

Dolby grinned. "I don't generally aim to take any the worst of it," he asserted coolly. "Come on an' dump my stuff off."

For three weeks after their separation, the two men saw nothing of each other; then Dolby walked up the creek one morning. He was the picture of deep dejection when he entered Jack's tent.

"I'm goin' out," he said as soon as they had exchanged greetings. "That cañon's no good. It prospects a little—like any crick or river in Alasky—but the wash is too coarse. I just thought if you'd maybe got all you wanted by this time, we could mush out together."

Jack hesitated momentarily. "Why sure, that suits me," he agreed. He was bitterly disappointed, but concealed it as best he could. Dolby had asserted, on more than one occasion, that when he was through with the country he would take a light pack and mush out alone. And now, here he was, calmly proposing that they travel together again.

"You see," Dolby continued, "I did intend to mush out alone, but I got to figurin' that packin' a sleepin' bag an' enough grub to last me a week wouldn't be no cheery pickin'; so, if it happened that you was all ready to go anyhow——"

"Oh, I'm ready, all right," Jack interrupted a trifle impatiently. "This

winter prospecting—well, I call it pretty tough. I'm ready to leave any time."

"I knew you'd got enough by this time, same as me." Dolby paused and studied Jack for a moment. "I noticed as I come up the crick," he went on craftily, "that you've staked a claim. I bumped into your lower center post. How did you find it—bouldery?"

"Oh, the wash isn't too heavy," Jack replied carelessly. "It could be worked all right if the pay is there."

"How come you went to all that trouble stakin' unless you know the pay's there?" Dolby asked suspiciously. "I'd think a man'd want to be *sure* he's got pay before he'd put in a half day or so stakin' a claim."

"I don't know. Lots of men stake just as soon as they make a little discovery—even a little flour gold—then they feel safer to take their time and go ahead and prospect thoroughly."

"Feel safer!" Dolby exploded. "Why would a man feel anything but safe about his prospectin' 'way out here? Say," he suddenly thundered, "are you goin' to *record* that claim?"

"I might," Jack replied in a quiet tone that infuriated Dolby. "It's not a very heavy matter; it only costs two fifty to record a twenty-acre claim."

"Is there room for another claim above?"

"About a claim length—you can stake it if you want—but my guess is that you wouldn't have a sluice head of water for——"

"Then what would a man stake it for!"

Jack shrugged. "That's up to you."

"Listen, Mr. Wise Kid." Dolby's small eyes were burning dangerously, and his thick lips were half parted, disclosing his uneven, yellowed teeth. "I bumped into that prospect hole of yours—the one that's about two hundred feet due west from your lower center post."

Jack sat up suddenly, but recovered at once. Dolby grinned.

"That hit you a jolt, I can see that. Now listen. I didn't have no pan with me, but a blind man can see that the bedrock looks awful good. It's rotten, an' it'll sure hold the gold. Well, I guess I was pretty wise," he concluded triumphantly. "I figured if you had rich dirt here, you'd lie about it, an' you sure——"

"Who lied?"

"Well, you stalled then, if you like that any better."

"And what if I did? What business is it of yours whether the claim is rich or hungry?"

"Now you're admittin' it is rich!"

Jack laughed. "I suppose I did," he said easily, "but what of it? You had your pick of the crick, and you took the cañon. If it does you any good to know it, this pay streak that I've uncovered runs better than three ounces to the day, per man. I would have told you before, but it was none of your business."

Jack failed to notice the dangerous glint that was almost hidden by the narrowing of Dolby's small eyes; or, if he did observe, he ignored the warning. At any rate, he was totally unprepared for what followed. Dolby, with a short, gutturally voiced oath, sprang from where he had been sitting crouched upon his heels, straight at Jack's throat. Totally unprepared for the attack, Jack fell back at the impact, and the two struggled briefly on the floor of spruce boughs where they had fallen. The struggle was a short one because Dolby was far the heavier; and, with his great hands at Jack's throat, his mastery of the boy was complete.

"None of my business, huh," he muttered as his big fingers tightened their grip. "We'll see if it ain't! We'll mighty quick see who records this claim first! If I don't beat you in by two, three days, it'll——"

Dolby's speech suddenly terminated

in a hoarse cry of pain, for Gyp who had finally realized that Dolby's movements were unfriendly to the master, had buried his sharp teeth in the big fellow's leg. But already Jack was unconscious, or practically so, and Dolby was able to turn his attention to the dog. With one kick of his great moccasined foot he secured his release; then sprang to his feet, following up his advantage with more kicks. Finally, when Gyp lay sickened with the abuse, Dolby turned once more to Jack.

"Now, you lyin', stallin' devil, here's where you get yours!"

That Jack, already half unconscious, received the punishment promised is evidenced by the fact that he regained consciousness nearly an hour after Dolby left the tent. Gyp, his own injuries forgotten in his solicitude for his master, was at his side, whining out his woe, as he licked Jack's face and hands.

For some time Jack lay without attempting to move. One of his eyes was swollen, half closed. Dolby had punished him severely. An attempt to move brought with it a stabbing pain in his side. Dolby had kicked him, too; perhaps broken one of his ribs. At Jack's anguished groan, Gyp nestled closer in a paroxysm more acute than that suffered by his master. Gyp's own aches had long since abated; he was now suffering vicariously. Once more Jack attempted to get up and discovered that he was powerless to move.

"Gyp, old son," he groaned, "I can't move; he's broken one of my legs!" With a low, piteous whine, Gyp licked his hands, and Jack dropped his eyes to the throbbing members. In a flash consciousness had fully returned to him, and he now understood his predicament. He was incased in his sleeping bag, bound hand and foot. "No," he corrected himself bitterly, "there's no bones broken, but there might as well be. He's left me here either to starve or freeze to death."

At this juncture Dolby, who had been panning the claim, opened the tent flaps and peered in. His thick lips parted in a grin as he saw that Jack had regained consciousness. A degree of relief was apparent, even before he spoke.

"Thought you'd come to, but I wasn't sure," he said. "I got rougher with you than I figured to—account of bein' made nearly crazy by that cur there." Dolby's speech elicited a throaty growl from Gyp. "I wouldn't 've croaked you for a whole lot," Dolby went on. "It'll look lots better for you to come out alive. So about day after to-morrow a man'll be along to turn you loose. I'll tell him that you went locoed an' tried to kill me, just because there wasn't but one good claim on this crick, an' I staked it first. Two days'll give me plenty head start. So long; you'll get a little hungry, but you won't freeze."

With these words, Dolby was gone. Traveling light, with a start of two days, he would easily win out and be first to reach the recorder. Jack groaned as he pondered this, and Gyp was once more upon him, eagerly licking the face of his helpless master.

"Gyp! Sit up!"

The little animal's ministrations were more than Jack could stand. He could not bear to scold the little fellow, and in desperation he decided to put Gyp through his tricks. One, two, three tricks, and then came the happy thought. On top of the small grub box near the stove lay the marble hunting knife! Jack's pulse was beating fast. Now that everything depended on Gyp, would the dog respond?

"Time we was cookin', old son," he said, dropping into his careless speech of other days, "an' remember you're the assistant cook. Now fetch me the knife, an' I'll cook us up a bite. Fetch me the knife!"

Gyp whined softly as he turned and

looked about the tent. It was confusing, this command. Never before had this game been played on the trail; only in the little cabin home in days that now seemed far remote to Gyp, had there been the leisure or inclination to play at the old game. Gyp hesitated, and turned inquiring brown eyes upon his helpless master.

"Gyp, old *son!*" Jack's heart was in his throat, and all the suppliant tenderness that he could command was in his voice. "Fetch me the knife!"

Yes, in spite of the fact that the master did not move, did not lean forward and slap his leg, which was all a part of the game, he was still anxious to play. It seemed to Jack that some such thought was running through the little animal's mind as it wavered there in the center of the tent. It was but a few seconds in reality, but to Jack it seemed that hours passed, as he awaited the outcome.

Gingerly Gyp lifted the knife by its handle and slowly carried it to his master, and released it only when it lay in the palms of hands which avidly seized upon it. Gyp sat back upon his haunches then, his long collie head cocked to one side and looked on wonderingly. It was exactly as if he were saying: "Well, I've gone through with my part of this ridiculous performance, now, what are *you* going to do?"

A green spruce log, designed to hold in place the boughs which made up his bed, lay at Jack's elbow. Holding the knife tightly, he stabbed it firmly in the log; then while the little dog continued to look on seriously, his master carefully cut the rope which was about his wrists.

"Gyp, old son, we'll beat him yet!"

It was desperately hard work, but in spite of bruised and aching muscles, they were ready for the trail in ten minutes. Jack had abandoned tent and stove, and with only his sleeping bag and provisions for a week, was encouraging Gyp to do his utmost. Hours later they reached the mining camp. Hardly looking to the right or left, Jack was urging Gyp through the village of tents, when a voice called to him:

"Red hot coffee, stranger! Hot coffee and two sinkers for one fifty!"

Jack glanced up. It was the cook, the fellow who sowed doughnuts and coffee in a wilderness, and with a cheery smile cultivated rough miners, prospectors and adventurers; then reaped a harvest of their dollars. Jack stopped short. Here was the one man who, since he was located right on the trail, might give him the information he sought.

"The fellow I came through here with about three weeks ago?" Jack asked, his words pouring forth in an unruly stream, "Have you seen him?"

"Sure, Mike!" said the cook, as one much pleased to give out information. "He had his coffee and sinkers with me not over half an hour ago. He——"

"Fine!" interrupted Jack, "I can catch him in an hour with my dog."

"Yes, you can! Say, he went out of here like a scared wolf—behind five of the fastest glass-eyed Siberian huskies a man ever laid eyes on. I see you catching him with one sick-looking purp!

"Dogs! He bought a team?"

"From Lacy Burns; Lacy's got one of the best claims on Arrow Creek, and he's getting out lumber whipsawing, you know, so he won't need any dogs; but at that, I'll bet the guy paid Lacy real money for that team. Lacy's always out for the coin, like me. Why, what's wrong? You're that white that if a man was to cut your throat, you wouldn't bleed a drop!"

Before the surprised cook could gasp out another question, Jack was at the sled, and Gyp was surging against his collar, eager to be off. Out on the river trail, several miles below the vil-

lage, Jack did a strange thing. After halting the dog, he seated himself on the sled and called Gyp to him. Gyp wheeled in the harness and laid his muzzle on Jack's knee.

"You did a lot for me back there, old son," said Jack, "and at the time it looked mighty bright for us. Now it's different. I wouldn't *let* myself understand when the doughnut man told me, but I see it all now. Five big dogs against just you!" Jack frowned thoughtfully as he continued to stroke the dog's head.

"Dolby was always talking about a man using his head to beat the other fellow. Well, I suppose I've got to hand it to the thieving crook; he surely used his head when he bought that team. Fifty miles a day he'll do with those dogs, traveling light on a trail like this, while we——" Jack rose uncertainly. "Maybe we can't give him much of a race, but, when a man don't know he's licked, there's only one thing he can do in this country, and that's—mush on, Gyp!"

Jim Dolby drove his fast team of Siberian huskies into the village of Suna at eleven o'clock in the morning. Dolby was extremely vain, and he was driving through the village slowly; slowly, because he wanted the miners and prospectors of Suna to ask him questions. In fact, a part of his scheme called for just this. He halted his dogs in front of The Caribou Bar, and "the boys" gathered about him. Questions came from all sides, and Dolby answered them all indulgently.

"I sure made the big strike, boys," he announced importantly. "She'll run around a hundred bucks a day to the shovel—an' that's mighty good dirt."

"What's become of Careless Jack Prince?" some one asked. "Did he get in on the strike?"

Dolby shook his head sadly. "I was just about to tell you about him," he said, with a grave shake of his head. "Jack went clean crazy—gold crazy, like some do, you know—an' wanted me to cut what I'd found with him, fifty-fifty."

Dolby was in his glory. His story was carefully thought out, and he told it well. Afterward, he expatiated at length on the "strike" he had made. He drew a moose-hide "poke" from his pocket and proudly displayed the ounce of gold he had panned from the claim. "A hundred bucks a day to the shovel," he said importantly, an' now——" The poke had been passed around, and at this juncture he took it from the one who had last admired it. "An' now, I'll just trot over an' record my location before——"

It was one word, yelled at the top of a man's voice, which had interrupted the voluble Dolby. It was the word, "mush!" and on the instant that the startled crowd looked up, a veritable streak of gray and yellow flashed by them. The streak was Gyp, and behind the dog, clinging to the handlebars of his sled, was Jack Prince.

"Let me out!" bellowed Dolby frantically to the open-mouthed crowd that was innocently blocking his way. "Don't you see he's beatin' me to the recorder's office!"

Before the crowd recovered from its astonishment and broke into a run for the recorder's office, little Gyp had curled himself into a contented ball in the snow, while his master rushed inside to file his location notice. Dolby ran for a few steps, dazedly following the crowd; then, with a disgusted oath, as he realized that he had lost, he suddenly turned and entered The Caribou Bar.

"If it hadn't been for Gyp here——" On his knees in the snow, Jack Prince eagerly explained to the crowd. Unashamed, for big tears were rolling down his cheeks when he finished his story, he took the tired little animal's

head in his arms. "Gyp, old son," he said, forgetting the crowd, "we surely learned one good lesson from Dolby. He told us all the way upriver to use our heads. We did; only we went him one better. We used our heads and—our legs. Dolby traveled days, but we mushed days—and nights."

MINERS' GOLD DUST SALVAGED

A SPECTACULAR rescue of three men and the salvaging of a cargo of ninety thousand dollars' worth of gold dust was reported a few weeks ago from McGrath, Alaska. The three men were Joe Crosson, an airplane pilot, and Charles Halami and Carl Carleson, miners. The miners had a cargo of gold valued at ninety thousand dollars, and had embarked with it on Crosson's plane.

The machine took off from a bar in the Kuskowik River, but owing to engine trouble, it fell into the water, which was of almost freezing temperature and filled with ice. On learning of the mishap to the airplane, the entire population of McGrath rushed to the river bank and used their best efforts to rescue the miners and their pilot, who had scrambled to the wings of the plane and were barely managing to keep free of the icy water.

Finally a boat was launched and made its way through the threatening ice floes to the plane. The pilot and his two passengers were taken off with their treasure and then the perilous journey shoreward was undertaken. The landing was effected with the greatest difficulty owing to the cakes of ice that filled the river, but finally the half-frozen men from the plane were brought to the bonfire that had been prepared on shore for them, and could again feel safe.

GIRL'S MOUNTAIN-CLIMBING RECORD

A REMARKABLE record in mountain climbing was made during the summer of 1926 by Dorothy Pilley, a champion European mountain-scaling enthusiast. In a period of nineteen days, Miss Pilley ascended twenty-five Rocky Mountain peaks in Glacier National Park. The majority of these had never previously been climbed by a woman.

In addition to these feats, she very nearly succeeded in climbing Mount Wilbur, the summit of which has been reached by only one man, Norman Clyde, a California rural school teacher, who is a member of the Sierra Club. Miss Pilley's accomplishment in 1926 rivals that made by Clyde three years previously when he climbed one mountain every day for thirty-six days.

In the course of her mountain climbing, Miss Pilley, in collaboration with I. A. Richards, of Magdalene College, Oxford, England, did a great deal of exploration work in Glacier Park, mapping new trails for mountain climbers among the peaks forming the Continental Divide from Glacier Park Gateway to the Canadian boundary. It is expected that the resulting "map of a thousand peaks," as it has been called, will prove a most valuable guide to other explorers seeking to conquer these peaks of the Rockies in future seasons.

Winners of Western Millions

(Collis P. Huntington)

By **Edward H. Smith**

ONE morning in the spring of 1838 a tall, strong youth—legend has it that he was the best wrestler in his county—was leaving his parents' home in Harwinton, Connecticut. At the age of sixteen he was off for New York with the sum of one hundred and seventy-five dollars, every cent of which he had earned unaided. His mother, who apparently would have fitted into the pages of a history of Rome, gave him this parting counsel:

"Do what you have to do. But do what you know yourself to be right. The moment you ask yourself what other people will think you may be sure you are secretly in doubt about it."

Sixty years later the recipient of this advice, as the master of some nine thousand miles of railroad, was being examined by a congressional committee. To a question from Senator Morgan of Alabama he replied quietly:

"I fear the opinion of only one man, senator. That man is Collis P. Huntington."

It was Huntington himself speaking. That his mother intended her monition of stoical rectitude to be interpreted with such ruthless meaning does not appear on the record. Nevertheless it was a guiding motto in the long, relentless, fighting life of her son. He never departed from it just as he never swerved from any path on which he started.

Collis Potter Huntington, contrary to general belief, did not come of poverty-stricken stock. His father, to be sure, was an obscure woolen manufacturer in a small Connecticut community. But his lineage included a signer of the Declaration of Independence and President of the Continental Congress, a chief justice of Connecticut, a lieutenant-colonel in the revolutionary army, subsequently appointed brigadier-general on George Washington's recom-

mendation. A bishop of New York and a president of the National Academy of Design were among his closest kin.

The family claimed descent from one of the band that followed William the Conqueror. Actually, at the time we encounter them, they were good, solid, yeoman middle class. William Huntington, a broad, hard Yankee of six foot two, had nine children, of whom Collis P. was the fifth. He was as big as his father and fifty-six inches around the chest.

Through his vigorous life he knew neither fatigue nor weakness in brain or body and had small sympathy for them in others. He could lift a barrel of flour and set it on his shoulder. He could walk as fast and far as an Indian scout. He could work endless days and nights without sleep. These are no hero-worshipers' legends. The man simply knew no pleasure but work. He worked tirelessly, easily, avidly. Considering his great frame, his physical heritage, it seems clear that he could not but become a master of millions and men.

A significant aphorism is attributed to his father: "Do not be afraid to do business with a rascal—only watch him; but avoid a fool, for you never can make anything out of him."

Collis Potter Huntington was born in 1821. His schooling, to his mother's dismay, was negligible. History, geography, topography are supposed to have fascinated him, but not to the extent of more than four months a year. At fourteen he went to work on a farm for seven dollars a month and his board. He returned home at the end of twelve months with eighty-four dollars. Throughout the first forty years of his life this passionate frugality knew no abatement. He was soon to demonstrate another useful characteristic which never failed him.

He had not been in New York two months before he obtained credit for three thousand dollars. This, remember, was at the age of sixteen. His first business venture was in watch findings. One of his *coups* was to buy at a low price a lot of dubious notes that another peddler had taken in exchange for clocks. As he could walk twice as fast and twice as far as any grown man and talk twice as hard and convincingly, it is small wonder the young Yankee was able to match wits with people twice his age. He covered most of the Eastern and Southern States collecting the money for those notes.

Evidently the young man's need to be always on the move became tempered with another desire that comes even to the strongest—the mating instinct. We find him seeking a more stationary occupation. With the money he accumulated out of the note transaction he bought, at the age of twenty-two, a partnership with his elder brother in a general store at Oneonta, New York. A year later he married Elizabeth Stoddard, the daughter of a neighbor in Litchfield County, Connecticut.

However, it was not long before a historical sensation helped to reawaken the restless spirit in the man. In May, 1848, a Mormon, fresh from Coloma, rolled down Market Street, San Francisco, waving a bottle of heavy yellow dust and shouting "Gold! Gold! Gold from the American River." In October of the same year the Huntington Brothers made a shipment of goods around the Cape to California. And in the following spring young Collis P. followed fast on the heels of his consignment, going by way of Panama.

But not so fast as he thought! While it was easy to go from New York to Colon, getting passage from the Pacific side to San Francisco was a very different matter. Most ships upon reaching the Golden Gate were promptly and unanimously deserted. The isthmus be-

came literally crowded with thousands of gold-hungry pilgrims, clamoring to be ferried north at any price. Meantime there were more than three hundred crewless vessels, most of them not even unloaded, lying idle in San Francisco harbor. Their swearing captains raged helplessly over the rich harvest of freights and passengers awaiting them. Some argonauts lingered seven months at Panama for a sparsely manned craft to limp perilously down the coast. The voyage north was usually achieved with volunteer and exceedingly amateur crews.

The fruitless delay took the heart out of many. On that fever-soaked neck of the tropics the mortality was terrifying. Hundreds turned back. But for young Huntington it was no delay. He simply looked around and promptly found a rich field for his abilities. He bought cheap the outfits of the discouraged and the dead and sold them at a profit to unequipped newcomers who kept arriving from the States in an endless stream. Twenty times he crossed the isthmus on foot, buying, selling, trading.

In short, he put the months of waiting to such use that he quadrupled his capital. He left Panama with four thousand dollars added to his original twelve hundred, and, when he reached Sacramento, there was five thousand in his belt.

In those days Sacramento was the most important place in California. The rush of the Forty-niners made it the big trading center. There it was that prospectors fitted themselves out, and mining camps obtained their provisions. So Huntington wasted no time in San Francisco, which indeed was then a half-empty city, most of its population having left desks, jobs and counters to join the stampede.

Neither did he waste his brawn and substance trying to get rich in the gold fields. He stuck to the job he knew. If you follow the history of the world's famous diggings you will observe that few ever got rich—and stayed rich—by discovering a mine. But that is another story. Huntington took his five thousand dollars, invested them in hardware and other things that miners need and sold them to the impatient prospectors. His first store was in a tent. Before long he had five such tents. Then he built a frame store and eventually took unto himself a partner, Mark Hopkins, who was later to be known throughout the West as "Uncle Mark."

It was an ideal partnership. Hopkins was the perfect office man, uninspired, but exact and methodical. He looked after the books, supervised contracts and purchases. "I never considered anything finished until Hopkins had looked it over and approved it," said Huntington in later years. Hopkins was unfailingly faithful to the infinitely greater man whose dominating capacity made his fortune—a fortune that often must have made him gasp.

Mark Hopkins was and evidently remained a small-town man. With his venerable, long white beard, he looked at one time for all the world like a Mormon apostle. Born at Henderson, New York, his family removed in 1825 to Michigan. He went to work in a mercantile house at sixteen, and with his brother Henry began to study law, not to practice but for the training. It stood the partners in good stead later. His first California venture was a general store in Placerville. Subsequently he started a whole grocery business with E. H. Miller, Jr., who afterward became secretary of the Central Pacific Railroad. The firm of Huntington, Hopkins & Co., began its existence in 1855.

With the trusty Uncle Mark to stay home and look after the shop, Huntington gave rein once more to his restless energy. He rushed around the camps everlastingly seeking out more things to

do, more things that men needed and that he could buy cheap and sell at a profit. He established three branches. The men who worked for him never knew when he might appear; whether it was the middle of the night or early morning. On one emergency he walked fifty-four miles at a stretch carrying forty-five pounds of gold dust.

One of his exploits was to corner the shovel market which, in a mining community, is something analogous to cornering the life-belt market on a sinking ship. Presently placer mining was superseded by quartz mining, and everybody needed steel. It was discovered that most of the available supply was owned by Huntington, Hopkins & Co., who had acquired it in the shape of junk for one cent a pound. Their customers had to pay a dollar a pound. Their clerks had to "live in" as did the white-collar serfs in English department stores. They were well fed and supplied with excellent literature and not allowed out after eight o'clock at night.

So the firm of Huntington, Hopkins & Co., became known all over the State, and, in a region noted for its large number of hardy, husky men, the cyclopean vitality and prodigious strength of Collis P. Huntington became almost legendary. He was soon to need both in a much larger and spectacular cause. His active, abstemious life, his Spartan training in a ruthless school, were fitting him for the tremendous occasion that was to make trivial the success of his first forty years.

The dream of a railroad from ocean to ocean had been in men's minds since 1833. For twenty years it spent itself in words. In 1853 Congress went so far as to appropriate money for a survey. When the war broke out the necessity was no longer imminent but present. Still nothing was done.

One day, however, the idea came to Sacramento in the visible shape of Theodore B. Judah, a civil engineer from Bridgeport, Connecticut, and a graduate of Rensselaer Polytechnic, at Troy, New York. He had a perfectly feasible idea for the most practicable route over the Sierras. For years the only accomplishment of his enthusiasm was more conventions. But in the spring of 1861 he addressed a meeting of business men in the St. Charles Hotel, Sacramento, organized by his friend, James Bailey, a jeweler. Here Judah was slightly more successful than among the conservatives of San Francisco. The Sacramento men, to be sure, had not much cash to offer but they did agree to stake the engineer for a surveying expedition. One man agreed to provide mules. Another subscribed a barrel of flour. A third contributed potatoes. Everybody came through according to his ability—except one.

"How about you, Huntington? We haven't heard from you," remarked the chairman. Huntington smiled gravely and shook his head.

"What? Why not? You've always kicked in with your share for other things. Why not for this?"

Huntington remained obdurate. The crowd was angry but said nothing out loud and did not urge much. The big Yankee's "No" was known to be unalterable.

When the meeting had broken up Judah felt his arm seized by a large, powerful hand.

"Look here, young man," said Huntington—he was only five years older than the engineer—"do you want to build that road? We-ell, don't you know you'll never get it done by holding meetings? Crowds never do anything but make a noise. Come to my office to-morrow and I'll show you how to saw wood."

To the ensuing conference he brought Hopkins and the two men who were to complete the Southern Pacific quartet —Leland Stanford and Charles Crocker.

It has been said that political sympathies drew these men together. New Englanders all, they were inevitably of the antislavery party. Stanford was a politician, Crocker a dry-goods merchant. Stanford was born near Albany and Crocker at Troy, New York. Stanford's father had been a small contractor on railroads and canals in the East. Both of them were in the California legislature.

Leland Stanford had a fine presence, with a large body and a large head. He started his career as a lawyer in Port Washington, Wisconsin; but a fire, which consumed his entire possessions, including his library, drove him to California.

Crocker was a clamorous driver of men, robust and hardy. It was he who put through the physical building of the road. "I used to go up and down that road in my car like a wild bull," he said afterward, "raising the devil with the boys that were not up to time." Hopkins related of him that he was "always trying to make a dollar buy a dollar and five cents' worth of material and work." In short, he was an ideal superintendent of construction.

Thus began the big adventure in the lives of the four, and Judah saw his dream actually coming to life. They lost no time. The Central Pacific Railroad Company of California was organized on June 28, 1861. Stanford was president; Huntington, vice president; Bailey, the jeweler, became secretary and Hopkins, the treasurer. A month later Huntington and Judah were on their way to Washington to procure the necessary legislation and grants.

There has been a great deal of envious carping at their achievement. But when you consider that the total wealth at that time of these four men, plunging into an enterprise that was to cost $35,000,000, was only $108,987, I think you will agree that their nerve was nothing short of stupendous. High finance in San Francisco looked down its "aristocratic" Southern nose and sniffed. Its newspapers openly asked, "What can a bunch of hardware and dry-goods merchants know about building a railroad?"

Imagine California's amazement when Huntington returned only one year later with a bill rushed through Congress that gave them everything they had asked. Judah's scientific knowledge with the irresistible drive of the big Yankee had inspired in Congress a speed such as that sluggish body had never known before. The bill provided that as soon as the company should complete forty miles of track the government should issue to it United States bonds to the extent of $16,000 for every mile on level ground, $32,000 for every mile in the foothills, $48,000 for every mile in the mountains. In addition to this they got a grant of five alternate sections of government land for each mile of the railroad and on each side of it. In other words, they were to have 6,400 acres a mile.

Then California woke up. The despised hardware merchant had put it over. Leland Stanford meanwhile had been elected governor and, under his guidance, the legislature passed many bills enabling State, counties and municipalities to contribute toward the building of the road.

Governor Stanford dug the first shovelful of earth on January 8, 1863; and the building of the first transcontinental railway—which was soon to develop into a frenzied race—began under the superintendence of Crocker. The troubles had only just started. They had to complete forty miles of track before they could touch so much as one dollar's worth of bonds.

Huntington rushed back to Washington where, for the next thirty years, he was to spend most of his time. Perhaps you think he had not much scope there for his celebrated strength and en-

durance? As a matter of fact he had to be four nights out of every week on the train. One day he would be in Washington, the next in New York, and thence on to Boston and back. His existence was one constant strain of urging, driving, arguing, raising money. He was the Eastern purchasing agent for the venture, and one of his first *coups* was to buy 16,000 tons of rails at prices that made the manufacturers extremely angry when they learned how they had been outwitted. The Yankee cunning that he had sharpened peddling watch findings and shaving notes enabled him to charter twenty-three vessels at panic rates in a bull market.

Likewise in selling the company's bonds he found he had to do everything himself. Flint, Peabody & Co., were his financial agents in Boston. Flint, the head of the firm, was stalling for weeks. Huntington suspected that Flint was working in the interests of a rival. Finally Huntington went to the broker's office and bet him he could sell the bonds better himself. He took a pocketful of them and was back in half an hour, having sold $100,000 worth and at prices that gave him more than a fair average.

In the year following the first breaking of ground he had actually put another bill through Congress giving the company even more favorable terms. The bonds, instead of constituting a first mortgage were now second mortgage on the road. This enabled them to issue their own bonds as a first mortgage which obviously made them much more valuable. Furthermore the land grant was doubled, and, whereas in the first bill mineral ground was exempted, that containing coal and iron was now included. Meanwhile, poor Judah, the man with the idea, had died of pneumonia, so Huntington had been obliged to defy Congress alone.

All this time Crocker had had his troubles with the building of the road. The first was the scarcity of labor. He could not hope to compete with the wages paid in the Nevada and California mines, and it was literally impossible to procure men to do the work. The only solution was the employment of Chinese. This put Stanford in a terrible hole. A Chinese exclusion act was an important plank in the platform on which he was elected governor. Not the least clever thing he did in his life was the straddling of his issue—an issue that still rages in California, although the white animosity is against the Japanese now. At any rate, Crocker was able to import ten thousand Chinamen. They were organized into companies, worked and lived under almost military regimen. Without them the road never would have been built. "There were times," Crocker said later, "when I'd have been glad to take a clean shirt and call it quits."

Also, in the early stages, some of the stockholders began to welch. Of course, it was simply cold feet, but it threatened the life of the enterprise. Huntington gave them the alternative of buying him out or selling. So Huntington tore out over the line and stopped every subcontractor and foreman on the job. The trick succeeded. The weaker men capitulated, thereby, incidentally, giving the four more complete control than ever.

With the passing of the act of 1864 they had achieved comparative financial independence. The first forty miles had been built, and the first lot of government bonds issued. The contractors were dismissed, and the work now proceeded in the hands of a new firm organized first as Crocker & Co., which was later superseded by the Contract and Finance Co. Of this Mark Hopkins became president.

Crocker was now able to push on the construction without worrying about his pay rolls. But he met other troubles in abundance. Landslides, mountain

torrents as the snow melted in the spring, a terrific accident and death list, strikes—he learned to face and outface them all. He borrowed a measure of Huntington's cunning in outwitting recalcitrant bands of laborers. Did he hear of a gang being about to strike for higher wages? Instantly he would send out rumors of a lay-off. When they gibed at the unreasonable risks they were asked to run he got out among the other huskies, shovel or pick in hand, and ran risk for risk with them.

But the biggest excitement of all—the race with the Union Pacific—did not begin in earnest until 1867. The fact is that at first their ambition had been modest. The partners had not dreamed of building anywhere nearly as far east as Ogden. The difficulties of construction through the Sierras were considered too stupendous. Consequently the Union Pacific, of which Oakes Ames was the guiding spirit, had not been in much of a hurry. In 1867, however, Huntington and Crocker suddenly awoke to the fact that they had a fighting chance to beat Ames' men to an important goal, the rich trade of the Salt Lake Valley. The Union Pacific laying its tracks over the first few hundred miles of level ground east of the Rockies, now had the most difficult part of its job ahead. The Central Pacific, on the other hand, was climbing down the eastern slope of the Sierras and the almost level plains of northern Nevada lay before it.

Messengers dashed along the line carrying the order to rush. Shifts were doubled. Stores were hurried up from the coast and deposited far in advance of the construction gangs. While Huntington bedeviled his shipping agents in the East to redouble their speed and get the materials to California at any cost, Crocker threw himself into the fight night and day. Six miles of rails they laid in one day, then eight, then ten. Bulletins of the diurnal mileage were received every night at headquarters with all the excitement of a world's baseball series.

And, no sooner had Crocker put the screws on than the Union Pacific woke up. They threw their graders ahead as far west as Humboldt Wells, while the Central Pacific men had their advance line forty miles beyond their track layers. Futile gestures, because the thing that counted was the iron spiked to the ties! In the spring of 1869 the opposing gangs were within sight of each other. The Union Pacific won the race. They met at Promontory Point, fifty-three miles west of Ogden.

But Huntington won the trick. The Central Pacific had filed with the Secretary of the Interior a map of its route as far as Echo Summit, east of Ogden. A cunning clause in the bill provided that for especially difficult and expensive territory, bonds could be issued before construction. On this ground Huntington based a claim and allowed the hapless Secretary McLaughlin no peace until he had them in his pocket—bonds for mileage that he never had built and never would build. Moreover, on the strength of the filing of the map and a prior right to the stretch between Ogden and Echo Summit, he compelled the Union Pacific to sell the Central Pacific, at cost, the trackage between Ogden and Promontory Point. In short he gained an entrance into the Salt Lake Valley although his builders had lost the race. The only thing he lost was a fight with Brigham Young. Huntington wanted to establish the division point at Bonneville. But Brigham would have none of that—the Mormons owned most of Ogden and needed the money. By the same token, the railroad needed Brigham's good will. However, it was a minor defeat.

The cheering that greeted the exploit resounded around the world. The golden spike was driven on May 10, 1869, six years after the death of Judah.

But the applause did not last long. Murmurs were soon heard in California. The men whose combined wealth in 1861 was little more than one hundred thousand now controlled a property worth one hundred and fifty million. Though most of their money was on paper and they owed the government $27,500,000, they were multimillionaires, these hardware and dry-goods merchants. Something should be done about it. The murmurs swelled into yells of graft! The echoes from the driving of the golden spike had hardly died away before the quartet found themselves on the defensive, a position they never relinquished until their death.

Stanford and Crocker thought they had won the fight and that the time had come to enjoy the spoils. Huntington knew better. He saw the Northern Pacific creeping coastward from St. Paul and the Texas & Pacific threatening the southern gateway. So the four were obliged, in sheer self-protection, to build north to Portland. On the south they started the Southern Pacific, hurrying for their very existence to get across Arizona to El Paso before the Texas & Pacific could beat them to it. Here Huntington had the fight of his life. He not only had his old enemies in Congress to outwit, but in the formidable character of Colonel Thomas Scott of the Pennsylvania, he met the toughest opponent in America. All the betting was on Scott, who had unlimited resources behind him, but Huntington licked him to a frazzle. Not only did Crocker get to El Paso first with his rails but Collis P. eventually made Scott sell him the line to New Orleans.

This is not the place to enumerate the various steps and intrigues by which the Southern Pacific was erected into the tremendous system it eventually became, nor all the fights, indictments and investigations the quartet went through. California soon turned on them almost as one man. It is undoubtedly true that they owned the State politically, but it is clear to me that if they hadn't owned it they would have been destroyed.

Their power naturally attracted both envy and resentment, not to mention a horde of parasites, in and out of their organization. They had, no doubt, many understrappers and employees who used the power of the Southern Pacific for doubtful purposes, but who can watch a whole army of assistants, all human, which is to say all greedy and corrupt. Frank Norris' "The Octopus" probably did not overstate the menace of the Southern Pacific as embodied in these vassals.

On the other hand, it came to be the fashion to attack the railroad makers. Being against the Southern Pacific was the cachet of political honesty in California for many years. Newspapers gained circulation and legislators either fame or gold by launching philippics against the railroads. They could be sure either that they would attain a great deal of journalistic renown or that their palms would be greased in return for dropping the attack. Huntington and his men had been driven to the point where they could stand no more assaults.

Alfred Sutro, the man who dug the Sutro tunnels and so saved many rich Nevada mines, furnishes the classic example of Huntington baiting. He wanted to be mayor of San Francisco. The way to get there was to attack the Southern Pacific. One morning the post office employees in San Francisco found the mail filled with thousands of letters whose envelopes bore, in glaring letters, the legend:

"Collis P. Huntington wouldn't steal a red-hot stove."

California laughed but the postal gentlemen weren't inclined to levity at all, and Mr. Sutro found himself in a situation from which he was happy enough to escape, without credit and mayoralty.

And in the natural coil and recoil of human affairs the quartet also came to bickerings and partings. Hopkins had died in 1876. Later, Mrs. Huntington, long an invalid, also passed away. Without undue delay, Huntington took to the altar a second wife, who had been Mrs. Caroline Worsham of Alabama, and whom he had known for many years. Mrs. Crocker and Mrs. Stanford viewed the new match with sour and dubious faces. Mrs. Crocker was an aristocrat of most recent pouring, and Mrs. Stanford one of those unapproachable dames whose silk dresses could stand alone. Huntington's new wife was gay, attractive, smart and a good deal younger. She was cut, and Nob Hill society, which had admitted Mrs. Crocker, participated in the slaughter. What scenes of pain and rage ensued in the Huntington household will be fancied.

There was also friction over the driving and tirelessness of Huntington. His partners felt they were rich enough and fully trumphant. They wanted to settle down and take life easy. But the restlessness of the old leader would not let them sleep in peace. He was off building his lines into Mexico, operating steamers to Japan and Chile. Finally, after deciding that the New York subways were not feasible, Huntington had taken up the building of the Chesapeake & Ohio and carried it through to success after others had failed. Among other feats connected with this work was the revival of the dying city of Newport News.

Before this work had been finished the final break with Stanford had come. In 1877 the good politician of the quartet had caused himself to be chosen United States senator. It was too much for Collis P., who shortly joined forces with the widow of Hopkins and threw Stanford out of the presidency of the Southern Pacific, announcing at the same time that the railroad was "out of politics." What the canny Collis meant, of course, was that his railroad was out of Stanford's politics. Then he proceeded to make this clear by throwing all the senator's heelers out of their railroad jobs.

But for the partners of the old giant the fights were nearly over, the travail of life subsiding to the last whispers. Crocker died in 1888, having founded a social dynasty with branches on both coasts. And Leland Stanford followed him five years later, leaving the money to found the great school which bears his name.

Old Collis P. fought on, unceasingly and undismayed. While he lived there was no hope of cutting the Panama Canal. He said again and again, and perhaps he believed, that the canal would ruin San Francisco and New York, making New Orleans the great city of America. One can see how the old war horse was reasoning and smile at his mistake. But, perhaps he wasn't so error-struck after all. It may be his shrewd mind saw in the canal its true function—competition for the transcontinental railways. Surely his mother's counsel rose in his processes again and he refused to harbor any vision but his own.

A great man this—one made by nature for his times, his situations, his deeds! Ruthless, no doubt, but living in a ruthless age, hemmed by the mighty pressures of wild nature and wilder men!

Those who knew him well tell many stories of his powers and qualities. He gathered pictures and picked out a few truly beautiful and memorable works. There had been at least one artist in the family, and some of his love for the lovely was in the railroad builder's blood. Huntington could be generous and vastly indulgent, too, for all his wild and ceaseless scrambling for power and gold. He had another mental trait belonging to the great, the faculty of absolute memory. He could see in his mind's eye every station on his near ten thousand

miles of railroad. He knew the names of every little hamlet, and he could recall the precise terms of contracts and agreements made thirty and forty years before.

Nor was he ever dazzled by his wealth and power, ever too much convinced of his own grandeur. His wife, his adopted children and other relatives wanted to get into society, and Huntington indulged their whim. Personally, he cared not at all. For them he bought a fine estate in the Adirondacks for a quarter of a million and built a show place at Throgg's Neck, where he and his family dwelt in the summer. Finally, he undertook the town house at Fifth Avenue and Fifty-seventh street, into which millions were poured.

We like to know how great the rewards are for such labors, such accomplishments. Unfortunately, wealth of the kind these four men made cannot be measured accurately, but we can come close enough for present purposes. Hopkins and Crocker, at their deaths, left thirty and forty millions respectively, counting only what could be appraised by the executors. Leland Stanford gave the great endowment for the university and left probably fifty millions in addition. And Huntington, when he died left an appraised estate of sixty millions, which probably was worth a hundred millions actually. So these four young pioneers did pretty well on their original hundred thousand or so.

Huntington, human and ephemeral, after all, had one enemy—time. He wanted to live to be a hundred and believed he would, for at seventy-nine he was still as hale as the average fellow of fifty—full of vitality, strength and mental resilience. Yet the fears and dreads of age were creeping on him. When he had finished the great house on the Avenue he would not live in it.

"Men build such houses to die in," he said, voicing an old superstition that must have been whispered at his cradle.

But Death took him just the same. He was sitting in the study of one of his other homes one evening in 1900 when his heart began to trouble him. He thought it was nothing and tried to shake it off, but the pallor mounted to his cheeks, and the legs that had borne him in giant strides failed under his weight.

"Why, I am very ill," he said in indignant surprise.

And in the morning he was dead.

THE OLD PROSPECTOR STILL USEFUL

IN these days, when many people are saying that the "old prospector" is a relic of the past, and that we can get along without him, it is well to be reminded that he is still a useful member of the mining fraternity. It was the keen eye of a prospector a few years ago that noticed a three-foot exposure of light-colored shale in a gulch otherwise strewn with gravel and boulders, north of Red Mountain, near the little settlement of Shoshone, in Amargosa Valley, California. He was looking on the east side of the valley for a deposit of so-called "fuller's earth," or "bentonite," such as is found in the lake beds on the west side near the same place. On closer inspection, he discovered imbedded in the shale a few small lumps of crystalline material which proved to be colemanite, the principal ore of borax. This deposit was bought by the Pacific Coast Borax Co., soon after its discovery and is now being actively mined. The ore body has proved to be unusually large and rich.

Split Three Ways

By Howard E. Morgan

Author of "Windbag," etc.

THERE was much excitement in Painter City, for "Tate" Watters had made a strike in the Meriden Hills. The old desert rat had filed his claim, then had announced his find across the bar in the Owl Saloon. By night, probably half of Painter City's one hundred male inhabitants, would be headed toward the Meriden Hills.

With the gold-hungry crowd milling about him, Tate Watters sat alone in the Owl Saloon, a glass of whisky untouched before him on the greasy table. His thin, leather-brown face was puckered in thought. He was a little man, slim and stooped. A tattered felt hat was tipped downward at a rakish angle over one eye, and, as his active thoughts shifted, his lips mumbled wordlessly. He seemed an inconspicuous, timid individual.

Inconspicuous, Tate Watters might be, but his worst enemies had never accused him of being timid. Perhaps, the best proof of the respect in which the little man was held, was evidenced by the fact that no man in the excited throng passing his table as he sat there, deep in thought, presumed to interrupt him. If one had been so minded, a glimpse of the pale, motionless gray eyes half hidden beneath the ragged hat, would have served to deter him. And, if these eyes did not impress, sight of the two ivory handled six-guns stuck carelessly in the wide belt, accomplished the desired result.

In other words, when Tate Watters wished to be alone, he was left alone. When he reported a rich strike in the Meriden Hills, no one doubted his word. From which it may be judged that he had built himself a reputation of sorts in and about Painter City. He was known to be honest, a man of his word, and kind hearted to a fault. Withal, he habitually wore two guns, with which he had many times proved

himself an expert. Prosperity and Tate Watters had often walked hand in hand; just as often poverty and he had been disgruntled bedfellows. No, he had struck it rich, once more—richer than ever before, but, along with his wealth, came trouble.

Between periods of scowling thought, as he sat there at the little table, the old man glanced at a scrap of crumpled paper in his palm. There were words, scrawled with a stub of pencil, on that smudged sheet: "Stoke Mesa. Help! Jim."

That was all. But there was a potency in the five words that stirred Tate Watters very deeply.

Jim Crowder! There was no other Jim. He and Crowder had been partners for twenty years. Five years since, Crowder had left his old friend in order to look after a motherless daughter who had grown up in an Eastern college. The last Watters knew, Crowder had been comfortably settled on a ranch in Tulsa County. Stoke Mesa—Watters recalled vaguely that this was the name applied to a particularly wild section of the country in the northern part of the State, somewhere near Crowder's ranch, probably, in Tulsa County. And Jim was in trouble—in serious trouble certainly, or he would never have asked for help. Time and again, Watters recalled Jim Crowder's six-foot, confident bulk, those snapping black eyes, the arbitrary, outthrust jaw and, each time, his bewilderment grew. What terrible thing could have happened to cause Jim Crowder to ask for help? Not that Tate Watters was unwilling to help. There was no question on this score. He would start within the hour for Stoke Mesa despite the fact that his leaving, just at this time, would undoubtedly mean the loss of a fortune. He had staked on the claim back there in the hills, it is true; but the mere fact that it was registered in his name meant little. If he was any judge of humans, claim jumping would be the rule rather than the exception in this particular stampede. And never had he seen, collected together in one spot, a tougher group of people than were now responding to his Meriden Hills tip. In other words, to reap any portion of the golden harvest, for which he had worked so hard, he should be on the ground to protect his interests. Or, failing this, a trustworthy friend—invested with half interest in the claim—should be sent on to hold said claim until the Crowder business was disposed of. And this latter was one of the things that troubled Tate Watters this hot August afternoon.

Without devoting any great amount of thought to the matter, he knew that there was not a man in Painter City whom he could trust, to this extent; and it was of vital importance that the matter be taken care of before he left for Stoke Mesa. It was possible—more, it was quite probable—that Crowder's difficulty would have to do with a shortage of money. In which event, it was necessary that the Meriden Hills claim should not be allowed to lapse.

Singly, in groups, and in pairs, sweating, blaspheming men straggled along the yellow street on their way toward the purple hills, dancing coolly in the distance. Within a short space of time, the Owl was deserted by all but the bartender, Tate Watters and Whitey Cook, the town bum. During twenty years Cook had never failed to make a touch on Tate Watters. Now, his bloodshot eyes flitted nervously from the dark-skinned little man to the bar, and from the bar back again to those thin, stooped shoulders. He would try it, soon. Tate was rich, now. The rapid flitting of the drunkard's dull eyes finally penetrated Watters' absorbed thoughts. The little man looked up. His keen, unmoving gray eyes

minutely inspected the sprawling figure in the shadows. Whitey Cook pawed the mop of frowsy white hair away from his face, and smiled doubtfully.

"H'llo, Tate," he said.

The old desert rat nodded. He did not speak. He was busy, thinking. Whitey Cook owed him a lot. During the past twenty years, he had practically supported the man, having, each spring, deposited money with "Squint" Hogan, proprietor of the Owl, to insure Cook's maintenance. Cook didn't know this, of course, but Tate had been sorry for the poor devil. Cook was a weak brother; however, he was honest.

"Oh, Squint, come here a minute."

Squint Hogan stuffed the dirty towel in his belt and hurried forth from behind the bar.

"Squint, did you ever tell Whitey here, how come he's been eatin' an' drinkin' an' sleepin' at the Owl fer the past twenty year?" He hated to do this, but, the situation was a desperate one.

Squint Hogan was embarrassed. His heavy feet shuffled noisily. Tate Watters was embarrassed, too. Still, it was necessary that Whitey Cook should know. The answer came, unexpectedly, from Whitey Cook himself.

"Yes, I know, Tate. Squint told me last winter. An' I ain't quite so ornery as you mought think. I been waitin' to ask thet you take me along, when you go back to your claim. I aim on stakin' myself a claim, an', ef it's the last thing I ever do, I'm goin' to pay you back."

For an instant, Whitey Cook's bleary eyes met Tate Watters' unmoving gray ones.

"I'm no-account, right enough. I know it. You know it. Everybody knows it. But I don't fergit my debts. Any man whut's done whut you done fer me!"

"Wich is jest right, Whitey. A man's allus got to pay his debts. Take me, now—I got a letter here frum a old fren' o' mine; he's in trouble. He saved my life once. We was partners fer years. I got to help him. I'm startin' pronto. An' I'm askin' you to give me a hand. It's like this——"

Two hours later, Tate Watters and Whitey Cook, recently declared partners and joint owners of the Watters claim in the Meriden Hills, shook hands before the Owl Saloon. As Cook's gaunt figure shuffled way through the dancing heat waves, Squint Hogan shook his big head dolefully.

"Yore too good hearted fer your own good, Tate. Thet bum won't last the day out. An' up there—with them roughnecks! He won't be able to hold thet claim, nohow."

"Waal, I'm takin' that chance, Squint. Got to do it. An' now, if you'll rustle me some grub, I'll git goin'."

Several days later, Tate Watters, followed closely by a sad-eyed old burro, heavily laden with the usual prospector's paraphernalia, plodded along a sunlit ridge top toward a towering pile of black, craggy peaks, indefinitely named Stoke Mesa. Having been a prospector all his life, it was not difficult for the little man to play the part convincingly. In fact, it could scarcely be said that he was playing a part; the only concession he had made to disguise the real Tate Watters was in the nature of a vest, palpably oversize and made to fit his slight body by means of a big horse blanket safety pin, which vest cunningly concealed the ivory butts of two guns stuck at handy angles in his belt. As he went, the old desert rat whistled tunelessly through his teeth. Apparently, he took little heed as to the manner of his going, but, a close observer might have noticed that a pair of extraordinarily pale gray eyes keenly noticed every inch of the inhospitable broken country bordering the mountain trails.

So far Watters had discovered but one clew; the Double B Ranch, which

had been the property of Jim Crowder, was deserted. A notice advertised that it was the property of the State. This might mean any one of many things. However, he had not paused to make inquiries.

Stoke Mesa, Jim's note had said. Evidently Jim was somewhere in Stoke Mesa, and the answer to all questions could be secured from Crowder himself.

Rounding a right-angle bend in the rocky trail, the old prospector came abruptly upon a man. He was very tall with saffron-colored skin and a quick, nervous gait. In his right hand, this rangy individual carried a whip; and, as he went, he struck viciously at the dried mullein stalks that reared their dusty heads above the rocks.

Watters merely nodded in greeting and would have passed on, but the man with the whip would not have it so. He fronted Watters on the narrow trail; and his bilious eyes questioned the typical prospector's outfit minutely, as he said:

"I'll allow it ain't none o' my business, partner; but ef I was you, I'd turn back. They ain't no gold in Stoke Mesa. Leastways, none thet you'd ever live to make use of."

Watters spat expertly in the direction of a brown lizard that was just disappearing beneath a flat rock. "How come?" he asked.

"Yellow Face" looked carefully about, and when he spoke it was in a hoarse whisper.

"An' they ain't nobody told you? No, I suppose not. They ain't nobody left to tell you. No self-respectin' person can live in the same county with these bandits."

"Bandits says you? Whut bandits?" Tate questioned him.

"Why, Crowder's gang. They control every highway between here an' the State line. No man's life is safe any more, let alone his property. Even a pore feller like me, my Jenny cow, she——"

"Crowder? Not Jim Crowder?" Tate asked.

"Jim Crowder's right, the ornery polecat. Used to own the Double B Ranch, he did. Decent enough feller he allus seemed to be, too. But once he got started—why, they's been three holdups within the past week thet I know of; he's been at it fer nigh onto a year. State's offerin' five thousand dollars fer his capter. But they'll never git him, becuz Stoke Mesa is plumb impregnable. Yessir, impregnable, that's whut it is. No man ever got in thar an' come out alive. Not even me would—harmless cuss like I be. An' they steal anythin' an' everythin'. Jest done stole my Jenny cow. She's in thar, some place. I'll never see her ag'in. She strayed, you see," the stranger explained.

But Tate pursued the subject. "Whar's their first line of defense, so to speak? You see, stranger, I'm plumb sot on lookin' them hills over. I ain't lookin' fer trouble, howsomever, an' though I don't eemagin they'd pay any attention to me, I mought as well keep out of sight as long as possible."

"Jest beyend that next bend, whar the trail squeezes through the hills, they's two fellers thar. Ornery cusses. They won't let you by. You'll be lucky ef they don't shoot you, offhand. Take my advice, partner, an' trail along back with me. Even if you should git in, your life wouldn't be worth a nickel after you was thar," was the stranger's reply.

Tate Watters grinned, and shook his head, slowly. "Don't seem possible, stranger. Why, I ain't got a dollar to my name; I ain't nobody at all. Why should they act like thet?" he asked.

"I tell you——" the other started to answer. But Tate interrupted him.

"Anyways, I'm goin' to chance it, in the mornin' mebbe. Whar's a good

place to make camp, this side of thet hole in the wall?"

"There's a cabin, off the trail a piece. Deserted now, it is. Crowder's gang done killed the feller whut lived thar. Ain't noways safe to stop thar. You better come along."

"Cain't help but think you're jokin', stranger. Anyway, me, I'm takin' a chance. S'long, see you later, mebbe," Tate replied.

And with a strenuous yank on the frayed rope connected to the burro, Tate Watters plodded on down the rock-lined trail, leaving the yellow-faced man shaking his head sadly.

Hastened by quick gathering black clouds, night came swiftly, and, although Watters had really not intended making use of the cabin, the possibility of a storm made him decide to wait until morning before attempting entrance to Stoke Mesa. In the first place, Dusty, the old burro, thoroughly disliked thunderstorms and was apt to make all kinds of a fool of herself if caught in one. In the second place, the old prospector wanted time to think over the new complications presented by the yellow-faced stranger. So it was that, when the gray roof of a cabin poked up through a cluster of sumach scrub just off the trail, he turned toward it.

It was a well built, substantial cabin, and showed signs of recent occupation. It was stocked with food; and piles of firewood lay ready to hand beneath the outjutting room. As the first rumble of the approaching storm sounded, Watters steered the startled old Dusty into a lean-to at the back of the cabin; removed the pack from her back and, squatting on the dirt floor near by, lit his pipe.

"Don't go for to git excited now, you ol' fool. I'll stay here an' keep you company. Me, I got to think." For a long minute he puffed furiously on the short, black pipe.

"Now, let's figger this thing out, Dusty. Jim—Jim a bandit chief. You heard Yaller Face say so, didn't you? Sure, so did I. It don't seem possible; but, admitting fer the sake of argyment thet it is possible, why did Jim send me thet message? Ef the State is offerin' five thousand dollars fer his capture, he's a bad egg an' they've sure got suthin' on him—enough to hang him a dozen times over, prob'ly, which bein' the case, how in Sam Hill does he think we kin help him? We cain't. An', if my supposin' is correct, he wouldn't hev asked me. Tharfore, seein' as how he did ask me, an' knowin' thet I sure would raise hell tryin', why—they must be a nigger in the woodpile, some place. See whut I'm gettin' at, Dusty? No? Waal, I'm tryin' to prove thet Jim ain't no bandit, or, ef he is, he's been framed."

Flashes of lightning shot across the swift-moving black clouds, followed closely by crackling peals of thunder. The old burro, rolling her eyes wildly, huddled closely against her master. The sound of his voice seemed to calm her.

"Ol' fraid cat. Buck up. Be a man—or a woman—anyways; stan' still an' listen to me. Now, about Jim; fer a minnit, I was figurin' on bargin' right up to thet thar hole in the wall an' askin' to see him. But now thet I've thought it over some, I don't believe that's the move at all. We got to git hold of Jim, alone. Understand? They's suthin' awful fishy about this, Dusty. Don't know ef I kin figure it out. One thing we do know, which is, thet pore ol' Jim's in trouble; he needs us, an' the minute we find out what's in the wind, we'll sure start suthin'. Ain't it the truth, you ol' buzzard?"

Huge raindrops pattered on the roof. Tate Watters came quickly to his feet; above the pounding of the rain, he had caught another sound. The muffled clatter of hoofbeats sounded on the

near-by trail. They were horsemen, and they had turned off toward the cabin.

Through the sparse sumach thicket he saw them, now. There were a half-dozen, all told. Still sucking on his pipe, Tate Watters gingerly lifted the voluminous vest over the butts of his two guns.

"Shall we git wet, Dusty? We shall not. Let 'em come. They's only six of 'em."

Nearing the cabin, the horsemen veered off and dismounted. Peering about the corner of the lean-to, Watters noted, for the first time, a shale ledge extending out from the rocky wall. Under this ledge the men tethered their horses; then all six of them scrambled for the cabin.

"Waal, Dusty, thet's the first lucky break. Figured they'd sure make fer here. But then, they ain't room fer six hosses in here."

Voices sounded within the cabin. Watters pressed an ear close against the log wall. Words came clearly to him, between the claps of thunder.

"Now, then, what about this Meriden Hills business? You, Dan, tell me the story. Rest of you rustle some grub."

"Like I said, an' old feller named Watters struck it rich. Joe Mendelsohn was in Painter City when Watters came in with the news. Joe, he joined the stampede. He didn't have no luck on the claim he recorded but they's gold there, right enough. Lots of it, right on top of the ground. He says they was a hundred thousand in dust an' nuggets corralled in the fust week. A reg'lar camp has started, called Watters' Camp. With all thet dust layin' aroun' loose there's been all kinds of robberies an' fights, an' they're aimin' on gittin' most o' the dust into town, pronto. The first load leaves Monday bound, over the High Bridge trail, fer Bedford. Joe, he's got the job of driver, an' he says as how the shipment won't hev no guards at all to speak of on account of everybody bein' so anxious to stay with their claims. In fact, he says as how he may tote it alone. Leastways, they wouldn't be no real opposition. Looks like a cinch."

"Joe will drive, eh?"

"S'right."

For long there was silence broken only by the busy clatter of pots and pans. Then, "a cinch is right. Boys, et looks like the chance has come. We'll clean up on this, an' beat it, an' leave ol' Crowder holdin' the bag. How's thet sound?"

Evidently, it sounded good.

"How about the girl, Lafe?"

"That's my business. I'll take care of Crowder—an' the girl."

Listening, scarcely breathing, Tate Watters came suddenly erect as the burro grunted gustily not six inches from the back of his neck. He knew that old Dusty's grunt meant something decidedly wrong; hence, when he straightened up, it was with one of the ivory-handled guns in hand. A dark shadow loomed in the sloping entrance to the lean-to. The shadow cursed, lunged forward. And Tate Watters, leaping nimbly aside, struck outward and downward with the clubbed gun. The heavy barrel struck the guard squarely atop the head; and, with a single, whimpering sigh, the man dropped to his knees, then slid gently to the ground.

For an instant, the little man stood very still, striving to gauge the racket made by the brief encounter. It had suddenly become very quiet within the cabin. Either they had heard and were stealing forth to investigate, or else they were eating. Watters decided not to take a chance on the latter contingency; anyhow, he had learned much that he wanted to know. The next move was to locate Jim Crowder and the girl, probably his daughter.

With quick, sure fingers he swung

the duffle on old Dusty's back, and, with a low-voiced command delivered in the wide-eyed old burro's ear, he slipped out into the semidarkness.

Reaching the near-by fringe of stunted spruces, he breathed relievedly and hurried his pace. Evidently, his encounter with the guard had not aroused the men in the cabin. Now for the hole in the wall, giving entrance to Stoke Mesa. Just how to approach this situation he did not know; one thing was certain, however, the time for caution was past. Once the guard back there in the lean-to was discovered, and the bandits of Stoke Mesa would be hard on his trail.

On the ridge trail he broke into a run, holding close to the shadows nearest the uprearing wall. Far in the rear, he knew that old Dusty followed. She would follow his trail, like a dog.

He slipped cautiously around the bend in the trail indicated by Yellow Face. And it was well that he did so. For there, not a dozen yards beyond the bend, was the hole in the wall. It wasn't exactly a hole, but, both walls drew in close to the trail; and, for a space of perhaps twenty feet, the perpendicular walls had been bridged across with heavy beams, forming a narrow, cavernlike entrance, through which the trail led, into Stoke Mesa.

At first, Watters detected no sign of life; then, within the black opening, a match flickered. An instant later, a man appeared, cigarette in lips, and squinted up at the rolling black clouds. After a casual inspection, he shrugged and turned away. And, the second the man's back turned, Tate Watters darted forward. Gun in hand, he entered the black passage-way. The guard's figure loomed blackly, back still turned, not ten feet away. The glowing cigarette showed a shock of curly, red hair.

"Stick 'em up!" Tate Watters' terse command came low voiced but ominously insistent.

The guard's big body stiffened. The lighted cigarette dropped hissing into a pool of water as his hands reached upward. With quick fingers Watters relieved the man of a silver-mounted gun and a wicked-looking, double-edged knife.

"Now then, 'Red,' you're leadin' me to Jim Crowder. I ain't givin' you no onnecessary advice. You act like a smart feller. Jest smooch along, right smart. Me, I'm in a hurry."

With a single, comprehensive backward glance, the man, Red, shuffled swiftly away through the purple dusk. His keen eyes missing no detail of the broken country through which they passed, Tate Watters followed closely, the long-barreled gun from time to time ungently nudging the broad back before him.

After a brisk ten minutes' walk, the old prospector noticed out of the corner of an eye, that they were coming out into a cup-shaped open space. Below, perhaps a quarter of a mile distant, lights flared in several cabins. The old man thought quickly. It would never do to march boldly down into that little settlement—evidently the bandits' headquarters—prodding one of these same bandits along at the end of a gun.

"Put down your hands," he commanded; then he came beside the obedient guard. "Now Red, I'm trailin' along with you, right sociable. You might even tell me a li'le story, so as to make everythin' look accordin' to Hoyle. But don't fergit to remember thet ol' Roger here is still pintin' your way; an' I'm jest keerless enough to fill you as full of holes as a sieve, if you so much as miss a step. An' we're aimin' fer Jim Crowder's place, don't fergit that, neither."

The big guard merely grunted; and, at the edge of the little settlement, turned sharply away from the well-worn trail. Before a well-built log cabin, half hidden in a clump of short

trunked spruces, he stopped. Tate Watters stopped, too. He stared, aghast, at a tall, white-faced apparition which had suddenly appeared in the cabin's half-open door. Jim Crowder! But it was not the Jim Crowder he had known. Here was an old man, a sick man too, if he was any judge.

"Jim," he said. His eyes rested pityingly on the drawn, haggard face. Crowder's nearsighted eyes, squinting against the golden glow of the sun setting through distant black clouds, seemed unable to focus on his old friend.

"It's me, Tate Watters, Jim."

Crowder's tired face lighted. He stumbled forward, and, before Watters could prevent it, had caught the little man in his arms.

"Tate—I—knowed you'd come."

"Sure's you're born, Jim." Gently, but firmly, Watters urged the now trembling Crowder on into the cabin. Out of the corner of an eye, he had seen his recent prisoner hurrying through the bush. This circumstance did not bother him particularly, for he would have been hard put to know what to do with the fellow, anyhow. He would give the alarm, of course, but even this did not matter; the half dozen men back there in the cabin might be expected to arrive any minute. His business with Crowder, for the time being, would, of necessity, consist of a brief word of greeting. He knew the story—enough of it, anyway, to form a basis for action—and a plan of procedure had already formed in his active thoughts.

"Mary!" Crowder called.

And at his call, a girl appeared from the direction of the kitchen, wiping her hands on a spotless white apron. She was a very pretty girl, Watters noted. A profusion of honey-colored hair fluttered about her flushed face. Her eyes were dark—black or very dark brown; just now, however, there was a sadness there that could not be disguised by the quick smile of welcome.

"This is him, Mary. Tate Watters! I knew it—I told you he'd come. But how?"

"No time to talk now, Jim. I know the story, or enough of it, anyways. Jest one thing; who's the boss of this gang? I know you're innocent an' have been framed. The only way to clear you, is to git the real crook with the goods."

"Lafe Murray is the feller, Tate. I was framed from the start, although I didn't know it until right recent—not until after I took sick. It all started with the killin' of Saul Goldman. I had tried to borry money from Goldman and he had turned me down. I had a row with him on the main street of Bedford. Threatened to kill him, I did. Next day, Goldman was robbed an' murdered. Lafe Murray, my foreman, brought me the news out to the ranch. He advised me to skip, claiming as how the cards was stacked ag'in me. I didn't want to go, on account o' Mary not bein' home, but I finally did. I came here. Later Mary jined me an' we've been here ever since. At first, I thought Lafe was tryin' to help me, but, jest recently, Mary learned the truth. Murray is the bandit, an' all his jobs has been charged to me. The Crowder Gang! An' I ain't been out of this valley fer nigh onto a year, Tate. Lafe wants to marry Mary. Of course, he never will, now that we know whut he is; anyways, she never did like him. He's played a waitin' game so fur; but it's only a matter of time when he'll bust loose an' start playin' his high cards. I hed a feelin' the time was gittin' close, Tate, an' thet's why I sent fer you. The State's taken my place—me bein' a outlaw with a price on my head—an' Lafe, he figures on gittin' the ranch fer a song, gittin' Mary, too, then either killin' me off or watchin' me swing—fer his crimes."

The girl's dark eyes eloquently attested the truth of this strange story.

"Mary brought you thet note; she found a secret passage."

Tate Watters came quickly to his feet as a clattering sounded on the rocky pathway just outside the cabin. Gun in hand, he peered out through the curtained window. He turned, smiling, and said:

"It's only Dusty, Jim. You remember Dusty? She knows I'm here, an' she'll look out fer herself, the ol' coot. An' now, Jim, I know they's lots more to tell me, but now ain't no time to bandy words. I jest learned, accidental-like, thet Murray an' his gang is plannin' a cleanup, an' a get-away, next Monday, some place on the Meriden Hills-Bedford Road. It's a gold shipment, but I'll tell you the whole story later. Now, like I said, in order to clear you, we got to git Murray an' the whole gang with the goods. We got to git 'em all. The fact thet I'm moseyin' aroun' won't scare 'em out of attemptin' the holdup, thet's sure. Of course, they'll try to git me, but I ain't worryin' none about thet. I'll be right on the job, nex' Monday; and we got to squash thet holdup. How many men is they all told?"

"An even dozen, counting Murray," replied his friend.

"A dozen, eh? Reg'lar army. Waal, we got jest one chance of pullin' the trick, Jim; I'm goin' to be present at thet holdup."

"You ain't figurin' on tacklin' it alone, Tate?" asked Jim.

"They ain't no other way, Jim," Tate replied. "Got to git 'em with the goods. No time to git law officers here."

Watters paused, head on one side, listening, as a gusty snort sounded.

"Thet's Dusty," he said. Somebody's comin'. Red sure got into action right quick. Got a place to stow me away? Upstairs'll do it. They hadn't ought to be many of 'em. The gang ain't come in from the cabin yit."

The little man turned quickly to the window, and tugged gently on the green shade with the idea of raising it the fraction of an inch. Outside, the setting sun shone red through a slit in the black clouds. And then, the unexpected happened, for, at his tentative pull, the curtain coiled upward with clattering clamor. For an instant, Watters was outlined clearly in the natural spotlight thrown by the vivid sun. He sprang aside, but not quite quickly enough. There was the sharp crack of a rifle, and a metallic sound as the ball pierced the glass. A shudder went the length of Tate Watters' slight body, and he slumped sidewise into a chair.

"Jest—under the shoulder—Jim," he said. Reaching inside his flannel shirt, the little man's fingers came away covered with blood. He coughed, and his thin face was contorted with the pain.

"Nipped a lung, I guess, Jim." He smiled, then straightened with an effort as he started to sway. "This may change my plans, Jim. They is—one more chanct. Mary—paper—pencil."

Swiftly, the white-faced girl obeyed him.

"Write this: Mr. Whitey Cook. Holdup planned, gold shipment to Bedford, Monday, tenth. Guard well. Git bandits."

He caught the pencil from the girl's fingers and scrawled his name at the bottom of the sheet.

"Mary, git that to Mr. Whitey Cook at Watters' Camp. Pronto."

He swayed forward drunkenly, but again fought off the growing faintness.

"Guess I'm goin' out, Jim, temporary," he said. "Don't fret though, because I'll be all right—day 'r two. Whitey Cook. You remember—pore ol' Whitey, Jim? My partner, Whitey is. Painter City's bum. I took a chance on Whitey, Jim. An' now we're takin' another. Ef he makes good

we're all set. I'm goin' out, Jim. It's up to Mary—an'—Whitey."

The sun was shining when Tate Watters awoke. The little room was filled with a pleasant brightness; the odor of balsam drifted in through the open door. For a time, he watched the dancing shadows play upon the log-walled ceiling, his mind groping slowly for actuality. He was hungry, and he was in bed. It puzzled him to be in bed in the daytime. Then, memory returned with a rush. He sat up just as Jim Crowder's stooped form appeared in the doorway.

"How long—how long hev I been here, Jim?" he wanted to know.

"Three days. An' you're goin' to stay there, young feller me lad, fer at least a coupla more days. You're comin' fine now, wound's most healed. An' anyways, you got to lay close. They've all been in an' looked you over; figure you're jest a blunderin' ol' desert rat an' harmless. You busted in here, roughlike, bent on visitin' me, your fren'. See? Howsomever, they ain't a chanct in the world of your leavin' this valley, alive—not ontil after Monday, anyhow. Lafe made thet right clear; he ain't takin' no chances."

"Mary got away, did she? Good. Three days—then, this must be Sunday? T'morrer——" Tate began feebly.

"You're stayin' right thar, Tate. You ain't able——"

"Awright, Jim," he replied. "Shet up. Me, I'm takin' a nap."

But Tate Watters did not sleep, although his eyes were closed. What a fix? But things might be worse. Much worse. The rifle ball, he judged, must have passed clear through his body. The wound was already healed, though, thanks probably to Jim Crowder's skill—handy at things like that, Jim was. He felt fit as a fiddle. Of course, he was weak, but he would do it; he must take a hand in that holdup. Whitey Cook might turn the trick; but too much depended upon this contingency. Chances were Whitey had already returned to Painter City, and was back at his old haunt, the Owl Saloon, drunk. And that holdup must be prevented; Lafe Murray and his gang must be captured. Jim Crowder's life depended on it; the honor and happiness of his fair-haired daughter depended on it. Following the successful culmination of his coup, Murray would disband his gang; he would take the girl and kill Crowder, or turn him over to the authorities. Yes, he must do it, and he would do it.

Despite his active thoughts, Tate Watters slept.

It was dark, when he next awoke. Jim Crowder slept on a pile of blankets before a dull, glowing open fire. Gradually, gray dawn crept mistily in through an open window. Slowly, noiselessly, the little man arose and dressed. The effort brought a cold sweat out on his wiry body, for he was very weak; but his head was clear. In the kitchen, he took such bits of food as came readily to hand and tied them in a red-bordered napkin. Then, as the first flush of pink appeared in the east, he stole out and away through the fragrant thicket toward the little settlement.

Smoke rose from but one of the several cabins. Probably there was a woman there. The men folks had, no doubt, started in the night for the scene of the holdup. Tate Watters was looking for the corral; he needed a horse. There should be several here, somewhere, for the business of banditry requires good horses, and many of them. But, even as his keen eyes located the fenced inclosure in question, a gentle neighing near by drew his attention. A sturdy piebald pony, ready saddled, was nibbling at the lush grass beside the cabin containing the early riser. The old man experienced little difficulty in

securing possession of the horse. And as he rode away, well hidden in the spruce thicket, he discoursed to the piebald pony:

"Likely this here theft is doin' your master a right good turn, hoss. I'll bet you him an' his woman has been arguin' all night, he wantin' to jine the boys, an' she protestin'. Even the most no-account women has good in 'em. Women gits hunches sometimes, hoss; an' me, I'm hopin' this here lady got a hunch that her man was due to git in trouble ef he attended Lafe Murray's party. An' I'm a hopin' her hunch was right, becuz why, ef it was, it means we're goin' to turn the trick and capture Lafe an' his gang. Onderstan'?"

Without urging, the piebald pony made directly for the hole in the wall. This was quite in accordance with Tate Watters' plans; if challenged, he would fight his way out; somehow or other, however, he felt that there would be no one on guard. Murray would figure that Jim Crowder, a sick man with several cracked ribs due to being kicked by a horse six months previous, couldn't get far away; and then, too, he would not be apt to attempt an escape while that blundering old prospector, whom Red Johnson had plugged, was on the danger list. The girl would stay with her father, of course. Murray was not yet aware of her absence. All of which Tate Watters shrewdly surmised, and, the absence of a guard at the entrance to the Mesa confirmed the accuracy of his deductions. The black passageway was deserted.

So far, Watters had made no attempt to follow the bandits' trail; the hole in the wall was the only generally known means of egress from the valley, according to Crowder. Once past this spot, however, he rode with eyes fixed on the trail. He experienced little difficulty in following the tracks left by the dozen bunched horses.

Within the first half hour of brisk riding, he made the painful discovery that he was much weaker than he had supposed. The trail danced and blurred before his eyes. He was dizzy and sick. In response to the early sun, perspiration stood out on his stubble-covered cheeks. He swore feelingly at these evidences of weakness.

"Whut's the matter with me? Gittin' to be a reg'lar ol' woman, I be."

It was near midday when the Meriden Hills reared their purple heads above a cottonwood thicket before him. The Bedford road curled its way through the wooded valley, like a huge yellow serpent. From a slight eminence beyond the cottonwood grove, the old prospector's weary eyes inspected that distant roadway. A billowing dust cloud caught and held his attention. There were several horsemen—Murray and his Stoke Mesa bandits! And he, Watters, was just in time. Even as he watched, they came to a halt, and, under Murray's direction, secreted themselves among several mammoth boulders at a bend in the road.

On the point of venturing nearer, Watters paused, listening. For several minutes, he held this attentive attitude, then shrugged and urged the piebald pony down the gorse-grown hillside. Strange, but this was the third time he had thought he was being followed—just nerves, probably.

Leaving the horse, he drew close to the scene of the proposed holdup, making his way cautiously from boulder to boulder, finally ensconcing himself within a close-growing clump of stunted cedars on a little knoll. From this vantage point, the wide sweeping bend in the Bedford road was clear to view. And a single comprehensive glance assured him that luck, so far, was with him. Although dotted with big boulders offering cover of a sort, the surrounding country was otherwise quite open, hence, any one of the bandits

succeeding in getting away without a reminder in the way of a bullet would be exceedingly lucky, that is, if he, Tate, didn't keel over before the festivities started. He wasn't feeling so good.

The sun was high now and it was stiflingly hot. The old man's sun-bitten face was deeply lined with weariness; but the thin lips were set in a white, purposeful line. It shouldn't be long, now. If Whitey Cook only would; but, no, it would never do to depend too much on Whitey. Perhaps the girl had not delivered the message. But, then, the possibilities of Whitey's failing were legion, and the chance of his being on hand, just at the right time, correspondingly remote. No, he, Tate Watters, must handle the situation, alone. When the team appeared, he would allow the holdup to proceed to the point where the bandits would gather around to gloat over the spoils, then he would go into action. He had two guns—twelve shots—one for each of the bandits, if necessary. There would be no time to reload. And he must shoot as he had never shot before. He brushed a trembling hand across his bloodshot eyes. The dizziness bothered him.

Five minutes passed, then ten. Braced between two rigid saplings, Tate Watters fought against the insistent faintness. Just a second's let-up and he would go to pieces, he knew.

At last, an English buckboard, drawn by a pair of fine buckskin horses, had abruptly appeared on the yellow road. With a mighty effort, Tate Watters cleared away the dancing mists that blurred his vision, sought the ivory butts of the two guns with sweating fingers. Something was evidently wrong down there, for the attention of the bandits seemed divided between the oncoming buckboard and the broken country behind them. A single horseman was drawing near from the direction of the Mesa. A big man, slumping wearily in the saddle, carried a rifle; and, as he came, he scanned the yellow roadway anxiously, apparently not having seen, as yet, the waiting bandits. It was the uncautious approach of this horseman that the bandits were watching.

Suddenly, Lafe Murray's gun flashed upward, covering the horseman. At the same instant, the horseman saw Murray. His rifle jerked up, caught in the rein. And, in that single instant, Tate Watters' quick thoughts grasped many things. The horseman was Jim Crowder. Despite the sickness, which might mean death to him following a ride like this, it was evident that he had missed Tate Watters, and, suspecting his destination, had come out to help. He had blundered into the very midst of the bandits. And Murray would shoot without hesitation, for he was confident of the ability of his twelve men to gain possession of the buckboard's golden freight, even without the advantage of a surprise attack. Jim Crowder, tugging at the rifle, weaved from side to side in the saddle; the horse pirouetted about, snorting and plunging. Lafe Murray sought to focus his gun on the uncertain target, and Tate Watters' gun pointed unwaveringly at Murray's heart. But, still, the old man hesitated. If he fired, they would turn on him. They would get him, sure. He was not afraid to die; but the gold would be lost and his ambitious scheme for holding up the robbers, of capturing them all and so clearing Jim Crowder, would be destroyed. But he couldn't stand there and see poor old Jim shot down like a sick coyote. He had to shoot.

Unexpectedly, Crowder's gun pulled free. He fired. The shot went wild. Cursing, Murray swung his gun about, following the plunging horse. Then, Tate Watters' gun roared. Murray's big body twitched. He staggered; and,

stumbling forward half a dozen paces, fell. The gun dropped from his clutching fingers. Again, the red mist swam before Tate Watters' eyes. He sought impatiently to brush it away with the back of his hand. Murray was out, anyhow. Drilled neatly through the right shoulder. Well, why didn't they start shooting? It would be all over in a minute.

His vision cleared, abruptly, and what he saw brought a gasp of surprised relief whistling through his set teeth.

The buckboard had come to a stop directly before the waiting bandits. The driver, white of face, sat rigidly, hands high above his head. Above the tops of several metal-bound boxes in the back of the buckboard, half a dozen leveled rifles indicated as many palpably cowed bandits. There was a scattering shot or two. Three or four of the robbers, out of immediate range of those leveled rifles, scurried away. And then, several horsemen galloped around the bend, led by a tall, thin man whose long white hair flew out behind him in the hot breeze.

"Whitey Cook," Tate Watters gasped.

Cook's men quickly rounded up most of the fleeing bandits; for, with their chief gone, they showed little inclination to fight. Gripping a sapling to steady his swaying body, Tate Watters focused his gun on a distant, fleeing figure which seemed about to make the edge of a sheltering thicket. Following the roar of his gun, the running figure pitched forward and lay very still. And then, as Jim Crowder and Whitey Cook ran forward to meet him, Tate Watters' grip on the cedar sapling, relaxed. He smiled into Whitey Cook's face.

"Good boy, Whitey," he said, then, still smiling, fell forward in a faint.

"Five thousand dollars in five days," Whitey Cook was saying. "Richer'n all git out. They's quarter of a million thar, ef they's a cent."

Tate Watters, propped up in the straw in the back of the slow-moving buckboard, looked across at Jim Crowder, who, despite his three cracked ribs, looked very happy.

"We're splittin' that there claim three ways, Jim. Me an' Whitey an' you. Expect you've hed enough of ranchin', an' 'pears like they ought to be enough excitement at Watters' Camp to kind of keep us young. Whut say?"

For answer, Jim Crowder reached a hairy hand across the intervening straw pile and gripped Tate Watters' slim one.

"Pervidin' it's still thar, Tate, by the time us pore cripples gits back on the job."

"They ain't no need to worry erbout that," Whitey Cook broke in. "I put a certain yaller-haired young lady to guardin' thet claim with a thutty-thutty Winchester; an' when I come away, every man in Watters' Camp was fightin' fer a chanct to help her guard it. An' so, I figure thet claim's plumb safe."

PROGRESS OF GLACIER PARK HIGHWAY

COMPLETION of the Paola section of the Columbia Falls-Glacier Park Highway along the southern boundary of Glacier National Park, to a point twenty-six miles east of Belton, Montana, was recently announced. This gives motorists a standard graded road for practically half the distance to be built, before a highway connects the two entrances of the park. With the building of these new motor roads, it is expected that Glacier National Park will be more than ever popular with motorists next season and in succeeding years.

Pioneer Towns of the West

Baker, Oregon

By A. V. Strode

Author of "Beatrice, Nel.," etc.

WHEN, about 1862, gold was discovered in the Blue Mountain region of eastern Oregon, miners rushed to the district, and three towns sprang into being almost overnight. Baker was one of these, though it was smaller than the other two, for it was farthest from the scene of most intense activity in the gold fields. For several years all the settlements grew rapidly, but with the depletion of the placer diggings, the men who had flocked to Sumpter and Auburn departed from these budding cities to seek their fortune elsewhere.

Fire and time have made Sumpter a place of fallen walls and charred timbers; and in the neglected streets of Auburn tall grass and young trees now impede the progress of the passer-by. Baker, on the other hand, has fared far differently. Founded at the foot of the hills where the Oregon Trail came over the brakes and into the Powder River Valley, Auburn early became a supply center for the prospectors in the Blue Mountains and for the homesteaders of the valley, the products of whose farms were in great demand at the mining camps.

When the available land in the fertile Powder River Valley had been taken up, other agricultural sections in Baker County were developed. The settlers in all the valleys looked to Baker City for such supplies as were needed on their farms or ranches. Cattle and sheep grazed in the mountains during the temperate months, and in the winter came down to the more sheltered valley lands.

With the arrival of the Oregon Short Line, an important division of the Union Pacific Railroad, the town's trade and importance in the region increased enormously. The slopes of the mountains near Baker were heavily timbered with valuable trees, so that lumbermen bought up tracts of forest land and established sawmills in the

town. Then, too, although the placer mines of the discovery period were exhausted, other mines, worked with different methods, yielded great quantities of ore. And Baker, situated where a railroad from the mining district meets the Oregon Short Line, prospered because of these circumstances.

The region about Baker City offers as much opportunity to-day as it did sixty-five years ago to the person seeking self-expression through typical Western occupations. Horses, cattle, and sheep are raised in the vicinity; big timber is to be cut down in the mountain forests; the mining of various metals is going forward continually in the Blue Mountains. Besides these activities so usual in the days of the pioneer, Baker County now engages in dairying, the raising of various fruits, vegetables, grains, and flowers for market. Not only gold but silver and copper as well are being wrested to-day from the depths of the Blue Mountains; more than fifty gold mines are in operation, and several exceedingly rich copper mines. Large deposits of gypsum and clay are being worked. From all these sources wealth is drawn for the fortunate townspeople.

With a population of about 10,000 Baker is now the largest city in eastern Oregon. It is also the county seat of Baker County, and the distributing center of supplies for a wide territory.

In the city itself five sawmills run steadily to take care of the consignments of white pine brought down from the surrounding mountains. Several foundries and machine shops as well are located here and furnish employment to skilled workers.

The community enjoys the advantages of gas and electric lighting systems and a plentiful water supply. A natatorium and a theater offer diverse means of recreation, while ably-edited newspapers lay before the public the political and social problems, the achievements of culture and progress, and all the incidents, great and small, which go to make the history of the present. For the out-of-town visitor good hotels offer comfortable accommodations.

Baker City has risen to its present eminence in eastern Oregon chiefly because of two factors—first, the location of the early settlement; and second, the men and women who have made Baker their home. Situated at an altitude of 3,437 feet, in a fertile valley crossed by the Oregon Trail, and near extensive forests and large ore bodies, Baker had numerous advantages over other early Western towns. The second and, perhaps, more important factor in the growth of the community was the character of its founders. Those men and women braved the stupendous perils of the march across a hostile country, and the hardships of pioneer life beyond the outposts of civilization. There still live in eastern Oregon some men and women who came West with the first immigrant trains. Among the oldest and most famous of the pioneers residing in Baker now are S. B. Bailey, "Dad" Chambers, John J. Dooley, John F. Jett, Archie Murray, and C. L. Palmer. All have had personal experience of the trials and dangers of frontier life.

Men such as these have impressed their sturdy virtues upon succeeding generations. Good government is the ideal of Baker's citizens, and they are expressing their purpose through the men most influential in the community to-day. Mayor C. L. Palmer heads the city government; William Pollman, banker and financier; E. R. Gurney, lumberman; I. B. Bowen, newspaper editor; A. A. Smith, attorney; and R. C. Frisbie, president of the Chamber of Commerce, are guiding spirits in the policies of Baker City and in the progress of this metropolis of eastern Oregon

Mist on Squaw Pass

By Ray Humphreys

Author of "Footprints Under the Snow," etc.

THE narrow, washed road from Idaho Springs to Evans led over Squaw Pass—altitude, nine thousand feet. Heavy, creaking ore wagons, with their six mule hitches, wound over this tortuous lariat trail daily, sometimes piercing great, damp cloud banks that shrouded the pass one or two days out of the week. The Idaho Springs-Evans stage, drawn by four wiry mustangs, also dipped over Squaw Pass twice daily; but on Saturdays, on its way into Evans, it carried a gold brick from the dredge boat that was operating above Idaho Springs; and on its return trip to the Springs it carried the mines' pay rolls, which came in by train to Evans from Denver early Saturday mornings.

The gold brick, representing a week of dredging, was estimated to be worth from two thousand to four thousand dollars, according to its size. The pay rolls totaled from one thousand, five hundred to two thousand, five hundred dollars a week, varying with the seasons. There was a legend, in both Idaho Springs and in Evans, that Squaw Pass was guarded by a benevolent Indian spirit that watched over the destinies of travelers using the pass. And it was a historical fact that the stage on that route had never been held up in fifteen years despite the fortunes in gold bullion and pay-roll cash that it had carried regularly once a week through all those years. This despite the fact that the road, winding through the isolated Colorado wilderness as it did, seemed to offer unusual possibilities to highwaymen.

"Thar ain't never been a holdup, nor even an accident, on Squaw Pass, an' what's more, never will be," said old Horace "Pappy" Stewart, the hoary stage driver, whenever he got the chance. "You know how Squaw Pass got its name, don't you, back in Injun days? Waal, thar was a Ute gal stole by a band o' rovin' Cheyennes, as a hostage. The Cheyennes were hidin' out in the pass, hopin' to ambush some

other Injuns; an' the Ute gal put up a signal fire, bringin' the Ute warriors. They wiped out the sneakin' Cheyennes, but not before the Cheyenne chief had found out about the fire an' kilt the gal —an' it's her spirit, they say, that haunts that pass an' keeps things sort o' tidy up thar."

Times and again, Stewart had repeated that story, both in Idaho Springs and in Evans; and it had become tradition. The older generation accepted it as fact; and the younger generation, although scoffing at it in secret, perhaps respected the beliefs of their elders. Idaho Springs and Evans had both had their bad men; but not one of these desperadoes had ever ventured to molest Stewart's stage. It might have been the tradition, and again it might have been Pappy's uncanny hunches, ferretlike eyes and expert marksmanship with the sawed-off shotgun, that had caused bad hombres, big and little, to leave Squaw Pass to the stage, the ore wagons and the supposed spirit of the stolen Ute maiden.

When Mike Tracey first heard of the enchanted pass and the rich stage that passed through it twice on Saturdays, he was on the watershed of the Bear, evading Sheriff Bob Roach of Conejos, who was looking for him on charges of horse stealing. When Roach gave up and went home in disgust, Tracey communicated with Ben Pringle, of Lamont; and the former comrades met in Evans by appointment. Here they eventually corralled old Pappy Stewart himself and heard the story of Squaw Pass first hand. They also managed to pump Pappy of a few facts regarding the bullion and cash shipments. Pappy, grown careless and talkative in his old age, was much more communicative to strangers now than he would have been in earlier years.

"Boys, you say you heard about me an' Squaw Pass over on Bear Creek, eh? Waal, that shows how news travels these here days," gloated Pappy proudly to Mike and Ben, "but it's all gospel truth. Yessir, that pass is protected by that Injun gal's spirit or else why would I git away so lucky all these years, carryin' over fortunes every week? Why, last Saturday I brung over a brick worth two thousand and two hundred dollars from the dredge, an' I took back the pay roll of one thousand, eight hundred dollars that afternoon—an' I been doin' that regular fer fifteen years!"

"Sure, that Injun gal is watchin' that pass," admitted Tracey, winking at Pringle; "an' I'll bet thar never will be a robbery thar, neither, as you say. But do you always haul that valuable stuff on Saturdays, Pappy, and never on any other day?"

"No, of course not," said Pappy, importantly, "the dredge cleans up Friday night an' the brick is put on the stage Saturday mornin', in Idaho Springs. I makes the pass just before noon. I gets into Evans about one o'clock; an' meantime the mornin' train from Denver has arrived with the pay roll, which George Dixon, the clerk at the stage office, holds fer me until I starts back to the Springs about three o'clock—the dredge can't ship earlier than Saturday an' the mines don't want their pay rolls afore Saturday."

"Sure, sure," agreed Tracey, winking again, "an' you bein' regular like that mebbe that Injun gal's spirit only works once a week, on Saturdays—thar bein' no need o' workin' other days!"

Pappy joined his cackle in the stranger's laughter.

With that much information, Tracey and Pringle laid their plans. Tracey, with some money he had cleaned up in horse deals, purchased the old O'Leary ranch on the south slope of Squaw Mountain, two miles below the pass. The ranch had long been deserted, but Tracey moved on to it, patching up the house and barn, and announcing that

he was "goin' in fer mountain lettuce" the next spring. It was an easy walk from the O'Leary place to the top of Squaw Pass. And Tracey, pretending to ranch, spent much of his time on the pass studying two things—weather conditions and the little white pine box there that held a forest service telephone, connecting with forest service headquarters in Evans. It was not long until Tracey had the secret of the telephone connections and thought that he had a pretty accurate idea of the weather—especially cloudy weather—on Squaw Pass.

Meanwhile Pringle, pretending to know Tracey only slightly, had worked himself into a position at the Evans livery stable, where his knowledge of horses got him the job. He said nothing, worked hard, and communed, at opportune moments, with Tracey whenever the latter came to town, which was always after dark. Pringle and Tracey found the Evans' end of the forest service telephone wire and Tracey tapped it skillfully at a point on the mountain about a mile from Evans. The pair went about their plans carefully, but Pringle was impatient.

"I can't see yit, Mike," he complained to Tracey, "why we got to wait fer a cloudy day or fool with this telephone business—why not just up an' at that stage next Saturday an'——"

"Yep," said Tracey, smoothly, "we might git the gold bar from the dredge, but that's all—exceptin' we might get caught, too. You know blame well that Squaw Pass can be seen from them Clear Creek cattle ranches on a clear day, an' if somebody saw us holdin' up that stage—we'd be caught. Thar's only two ways off the pass—this way, or to Idaho Springs, an' we could be easily bottled up, an' further——"

"Further, this is a two-way, two-man job," he said. "I aim to git the brick on the pass an' you aim to git the pay roll at this end. The job's got to be done quickly—an' now I'm tellin' you about that telephone. Next Saturday you git in on that cut-in at eleven o'clock. You'll git a call from me when the stage passes the high point just before noon. I ain't goin' to say much, fer fear some ears we don't know about may be on that line; but I'll tip you off one way or another—whether I pulled that stage job or not—see? An' you act accordin'—if I tells you I did, you pull this end—otherwise we got to wait until a Saturday week; an' by the way, I won't be in to see you again before we pull the job—I think somebody is already suspicious of you or me, Pringle!"

"No!" gasped Pringle, turning pale.

"Waal, of me, anyway," explained Tracey. "That sheriff from Idaho Springs dropped in on my place yesterday, an' fortunately I wasn't on the pass. He just stopped for a visit, he said, but I ain't so sure. I showed him all the improvements I made an' I sang him the song o' lettuce—plant lettuce an' reap the harvest—an' he went away satisfied, I think."

"Great guns!" exclaimed Pringle.

"That's why I ain't connectin' with you no more," said Tracey, "fer your good an' mine an' the sake of this job; remember, be on that phone Saturday mornin' at eleven, an' you'll get the word one way or another—we'll pull it Saturday if it's cloudy——"

"If I could only see Squaw Pass from here," said Pringle.

"You don't need to," snapped Tracey.

The rest of the week Tracey stuck close to his ranch. He used the time to repair some of the fences, hoping that if the sheriff came snooping around again he'd find him so engaged. But the sheriff didn't come and Tracey took heart. He grinned as he puttered on the fences, thinking that if all went right he'd never return to that desolate ranch after he left it Saturday morning for the pass. Friday Tracey oiled his

rifle and then hid it again where he kept it concealed in the long grass beyond the rusty pump. Saturday at dawn Tracey was up on the pass, praying for clouds. But no clouds came. The pass was bathed in sunlight and when the first of the ore wagons came along, with the tinkling bells on the leaders of the mule hitches, Tracey took refuge in a thick growth of scrub oak.

The Idaho Springs sheriff rode the seat with Stewart.

"Tipped off!" grunted Tracey, savagely. "Can you beat that! Waal, if that don't take the weddin' cake—I thought that ol' sheriff was nosin' around fer no good."

When the stage was well down the road toward Evans, and out of sight, Tracey ran to the forest service telephone.

"No," he said into the mouthpiece, distinctly, "no!"

"Uh-huh!" came the equally ambiguous answer from Pringle.

Tracey went back to his ranch wondering, but as the rest of the day and Sunday passed without another call from the sheriff, he recovered his confidence. After all, if the sheriff had anything positive, decided Tracey, he'd have been after him before this. As the days passed he ceased worrying. He made up his mind that if Saturday was cloudy and the mists hung low on Squaw Pass he'd hold up that stage, sheriff or no sheriff.

"I kin git the drop on both Stewart an' the sheriff as easy as on one," said Tracey, to himself, "an' if necessary I kin drill 'em both; if thar's no shootin' I'll have Pappy Stewart tie the sheriff an' any passengers thar may be on the stage, an' then I'll tie Stewart up—then I'll take the brick, phone Pringle an' start for Evans. By the time I gits to Evans, Pringle will have the pay roll an' we'll hit out west from thar!"

Tracey was up before dawn that Saturday morning. He got his gun and his horse and was in the oak thicket near the top of Squaw Pass when the first streaks of day gilded the eastern skies. But they were only tawny streaks that failed to brighten. Again and again, Tracey grunted in approval, each time consulting his watch. As it got lighter Tracey saw the rain clouds hanging low over the mountains. The day of days had come at last; the clouds hung low on Squaw Pass.

The hours that immediately followed were happy ones for Tracey. Again and again he reviewed his plans for the robbery, assuring himself that there was no flaw in the arrangements. If the sheriff was on the stage it would be that much better, Tracey decided, for it would leave Pringle with a clear field at the Evans end. Pringle was all right, tried in many a test, Tracey recollected, but it was just as well to have the sheriff on the pass.

"Guns were made to shoot," he commented aloud.

At ten o'clock the first ore wagon rumbled over the pass, the bells of the leaders tingling musically. The mist was so heavy that Tracey could not see the mules or the wagon from his cover. But he did not care; the bells told the story. At a quarter to eleven another ore wagon passed and again Tracey's eyes could not pierce the clouds, which were swirling and eddying about him. At half past eleven another bell-team strained up the slope and went over the pass. This time Tracey was nervous. He edged out of his cover and ventured as close to the road as he could, and there he made out the dim outline of the long ore wagon.

"Clouds, clouds, clouds!" he muttered, hoarsely, "too many—I never kin see that stage from here! I got to get outside thar—closer—whar I can hear the wheels—fer the stage ain't got bells—an' thar ought to be one more ore wagon, too!"

Then, in the interval of waiting,

Tracey became nervous. At length he slipped out into the road and carefully examined the tracks of the wagons that had passed—broad iron-tired wheels every one—nothing but ore wagons had gone over.

"I'm glad I thought to examine that stage track the other day," murmured Tracey, much relieved, "I'd know that narrow wheel track in a million now—it ain't been past!"

Retreating to the edge of the thicket, Tracey sat down to wait, his breath coming in short quick jerks despite himself. He tried to light a cigarette, but his hand shook in the attempt and he threw the cigarette away with a curse.

"That fourth ore wagon," he muttered, "it ought to be here—— What if they come together? Kin I handle the ore driver, too? Wonder if he's armed!"

But almost as he spoke his ears caught the faint jingle of bells.

"Thar comes the fourth wagon now," he exclaimed. "I mustn't let him see me. I gotta be careful—mebbe the stage is right behind him! I never saw such mist—too much, too much!"

The sound of the bells approached closer, and to Tracey's nervous ears the wagon seemed to be speeding faster than the others. For a moment he thought it might be an empty wagon, coming from the other direction, until he remembered that the ore wagons did not return until late afternoon. He stood motionless as the bells tingled past. He saw a shadow through the mists and that was all; but immediately after the wagon had passed he threw himself on the ground, his right ear close to the earth, to see if he could catch any sound of the approaching stage, now due.

But there was no sound, after the wagon had gone on.

Again and again, in the next few minutes, Tracey consulted his watch. Eleven fifty-five—and eleven fifty-eight—and twelve o'clock noon. The stage was surely late! And what did that mean? Was there a slip-up somewhere? Had he been suspected? Was the bullion aboard? Had there been an accident?

Tracey paced back and forth, swearing angrily. At twelve five he was desperate. At twelve-seven he considered telephoning to Pringle, but he decided that that would be foolhardy. The stage might pass while he was at the phone and, at any rate, there was no use in alarming Pringle. No, he'd wait. At twelve-ten he threw himself on the ground again to listen, but in vain. Already the stage was fifteen to twenty minutes late. Something must have happened. He reached for another cigarette and lit it this time. At twelve-twelve he snatched the cigarette from his mouth.

"What the mischief!" he exclaimed incredulously, "Bells!"

His face deathly white, every nerve in his body tensed, Tracey listened. Yes, bells! He could barely hear them, but they were bells, and the sound was coming nearer. An empty ore wagon coming back, perhaps! But no! The sound was coming as the others had come, from the direction of Idaho Springs. Bells! An ore wagon! But the four ore wagons had already gone over the pass!

"It's the stage, sure as shootin'," cried Tracey excitedly, jumping to his feet, "Ol' Pappy's put bells on his leaders fer some reason—like as not to fool me. But how did he know—aw, he doesn't know—I'm gittin' childish, but——"

Tracey cocked his ears again.

"That sounds like an ore outfit—yep, it does! But it can't be—thar's four ore outfits an' they've all passed. It's the stage sure—all right Tracey, do your stuff——"

Raising the rifle to alert, Tracey ventured closer to the roadway as the bells

rang nearer. He had planned to plant himself squarely in front of the leaders, but the mist made this impossible. He would have to wait at the road's edge until he could see Stewart and the sheriff—if the sheriff was there—on the stage box. He would let the leaders alone. They might shy at him and warn Old Pappy—but that was a chance.

Nearer and nearer came the singing bells.

Gripping his rifle tighter, Tracey cleared his throat, and made ready to ring out the command, "Hands up, you!"

The bells were close at hand now—almost on him—ah, shapes in the mist—the leaders—the leaders, but mules!

It was instinct more than desire that caused Tracey to leap squarely backwards. He fell, as he landed, but the mist shielded him as the big wagon rumbled past. In an instant Tracey was on his feet, stalking the wagon. He ran after, heard the screeching brakes as the driver struck the downgrade, and in another minute darted out of the mist to take a good look at the end of that vehicle. It was an *ore* wagon!

Back into the mist went Tracey, nimble as a jack rabbit, and as frightened. Five ore wagons—what did it mean? Had he counted wrong? Had the companies put on a fifth outfit that day?

"Mules!" cried Tracey, wetting his dry lips with nervous tongue, "I knew then it was an ore outfit—Old Pappy uses broncs—but a fifth wagon—I can't—but say!"

Again Tracey ran to the road to read tracks.

"Gee whiz!" he exclaimed, straightening up almost at once, "I might have known it—the stage has gone past! Thar's it's narrer track—it was the one before this last—it had bells, all right, an' I thought it was the fourth ore wagon!"

For a moment Tracey sobbed, then he recovered himself.

"Pringle!" he thought, "I must phone Pringle!"

Darting across the road, Tracey ran to the forest service telephone box. He took down the receiver. He felt, rather than knew, that his partner waited on the line.

"Missed—on—the—pass," Tracey began.

"Uh-huh!" came Pringle's non-committal answer.

"An' say," went on Tracey, but he got no reply. Pringle had left the line. Tracey grunted and closed the box.

"He's in a big hurry," he remarked, "when he got another whole week—or mebbe more—to wait for another cloudy day an' that stage—but I guess he's nervous, too!"

Tracey retraced his steps to the scrub oak thicket, where he got his horse. He walked down the pass, leading the horse behind him. The clouds were lifting as he sauntered down the south slope of the mountain, headed for his home at the ranch.

Meanwhile, in Evans, Pringle was very busy. He took the fastest horse in the livery stable, saddled it, and rode over to the office of the Idaho Springs Evans Stage Line. Dixon, the clerk there, was busy sorting out freight that had come in on the Denver train. Pringle walked in, a gun in his hand.

"Say, Dixon," drawled the bandit, "I come fer that pay roll money—I guess I can have it, can't I?"

Dixon whirled at the voice and stared into the gun.

"What's this?" he cried, "a holdup?"

"Call it what you like, brother," remarked Pringle, "but me an' my partner is collectin' stuff to-day—an' I come fer that pay roll; better hand it over without no monkey business!"

Dixon glanced at the clock.

"You're drunk!" he accused, "an' the stage will be here any minnit now—it won't be a joke if they ketch you here!"

"Stage?" snorted Pringle contemptu-

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ously, "say, brother, that stage is delayed—on the pass—by my partner, see? Now hand over that dough right sudden!"

The clerk grunted.

"Yes, the money is here," he said, doggedly, "but I ain't tellin' you whar—you kin look fer it, if you please——"

Pringle grinned at Dixon.

"You step in the back room, Mr. Dixon," said Pringle, graciously, "an' step fast. Hear me?"

Five minutes later, with the clerk securely tied up in the rear room, Pringle stepped jauntily out into the main office. He went through the open safe first, then through the counter cash drawer. He was engaged in rummaging along the shelves behind the counter, which were stacked with packages, when he heard some one enter. He whirled, bringing up his gun, to find himself looking into the muzzle of a sawed-off shotgun in the hands of Old Pappy Stewart, the stage driver. Alongside Pappy, and in the act of drawing a pistol, was the sheriff.

"Howdy," said the sheriff, none too cordially, "you better just ease that gun down on the counter, mister!"

Pringle obeyed mechanically.

"I'll chuck this brick in the safe," said the sheriff, while Pringle gasped, "an' then we'll look fer Dixon. You ain't killed Dixon, have you, Pringle?"

"I ain't kilt nuthin'," said Pringle hopelessly, as his eyes rested in awe on the gold bar the sheriff produced, "I thought you fellers—were in an—an accident—up on the pass——"

"Accident?" snorted old Pappy Stewart, at that, "yes, I was yesterday; we run into some fog the other side of the pass an' my leaders hit the leaders of an ore wagon. But not to-day—I got bells on my hosses now, beginning this mornin'."

An hour later a posse, with the miserable Pringle in tow, inspected Squaw Pass. The sharp eyes of Old Pappy discovered the tracks leading in and out of the oak thicket, and a short time later the same posse dropped down to the O'Leary ranch, having followed the telltale tracks down the mountain road. They took Tracey by surprise, and before he could make for his rifle, which he had concealed in the grass, they had him covered. He gave up, peacefully enough, when the sheriff explained what they wanted him for—an attempted stage robbery.

"An' you knowin' full well enough that Squaw Pass is pertected by Injun spirits, which don't allow nuthin' like that to happen," accused Old Pappy Stewart, childishly. "Why, seems to me you was with Mister Pringle here the very day I tol' you all about that Ute Injun gal, what was stole by a band of sneakin' Cheyennes an' brought up here to the pass an'——"

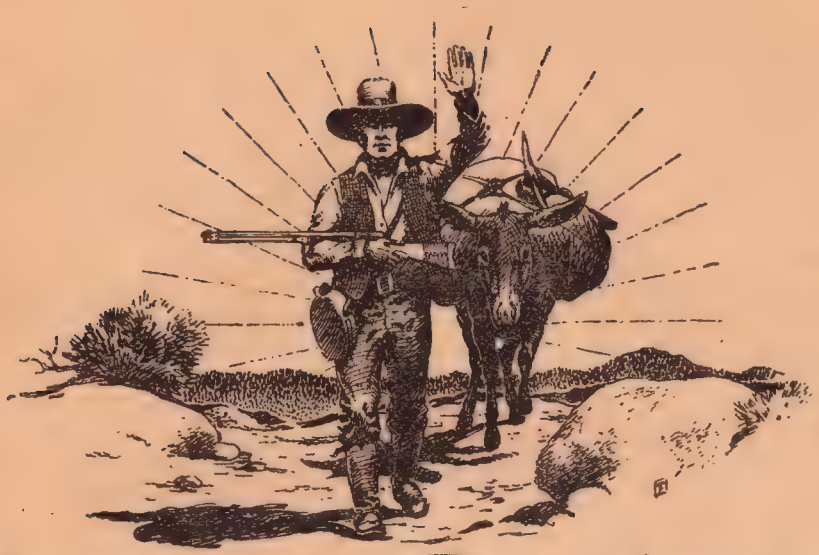
"Say, bo," said Tracey, in an undertone to the miserable Pringle, "looks to me like you squawked on me!"

"Squawked nuthin'," whimpered the unhappy Pringle, "seems you double crossed me! When you telephoned me 'mist on the pass' I figgered that meant, thar bein' mist up here, you'd pulled the job——"

"Mist?" echoed Tracey, his eyes popping, "why, I didn't say that or mean that. What I said, you boob, was *missed* on the pass, m-i-s-s-e-d,' meanin' I fell down—lost out——"

"Come along, boys," boomed the sheriff, cutting in, "we got to be gettin' back; I'll have to apologize fer our jail house, it ain't very much; but shucks, you'll be tried at the spring term of court, an' that's only four months off. Come on!"

"It was right about here," piped up Old Pappy, "that I always figgered that Ute Injun gal built the signal fire, which brung on the Ute warriors—hey, sheriff, wait a minnit fer me!"



Miner's Potlatch

By J. A. Thompson

In response to the great number of letters requesting information on mines and mining conditions of to-day, WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE has established this department devoted to the problems of the present-day prospector. J. A. Thompson, a mining engineer with many years' practical experience in the mining camps of both Americas, has been retained to answer all questions on the subject.

All communications should be addressed to him, care of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

HOW do I stake a claim? What do I have to do after I have found valuable mineral deposits on a piece of property? How big a claim can I stake, and to whom must I report my findings?

The above questions have been selected from a host of similar inquiries addressed to this magazine. Naturally enough it is of paramount importance to the gold-seeker, the prospector, searching the hills and the wildernesses for signs of the precious metals, to know just what to do to retain his prize once success has crowned his efforts. The laws of the United States are particularly liberal and fair-minded toward the actual discoverer of valuable minerals. Legally speaking, the United States is the prospector's El Dorado. For instance, according to the statutes covering the United States and the Territory of Alaska, any native born citizen, or any alien, who has formally declared his intention of becoming a citizen under the naturalization laws, may freely search for and appropriate any deposit that he is the first to discover. In contrast to this, most foreign countries exact a certain percentage of the value of the mineral discovered as a tax to which the government is entitled.

Contrary to the general belief, it is not legally necessary in the United States for a man to record his claim to be entitled to work it. The law says that

a miner may, without recording, extract ore from a claim and convert it to his own uses, so long as he is in actual physical possession of the property, and was the first to discover mineral thereon. (S. P.—Des Moines. The above answers your specific question.)

In actual practice, to avoid subsequent litigation, recording is practically always resorted to. Failure to record gives any other citizen, who desires to possess the ground, the right to attack the discoverer's title and assert a legal claim for the possession of every part or the whole of the discovery.

In staking claims in this country, the government recognizes four separate types—lode, placer, tunnel, and mill site. The two most common are the placer and lode. The lode will be described here as most of the present inquiries concern that type of property. A lode claim must be staked in a parallelogram one thousand five hundred feet along the center line and six hundred feet or less in width on a line at right angles to the center line. End and side lines must be parallel to each other.

Discovery of mineral in the rock must occur before the claim may be legally staked and recorded. A post should be first erected at the point of discovery with a notice giving the names of locators, date of discovery, and name of claim. This must be somewhere inside the corner posts but not necessarily in the geometrical center of the parallelogram. On the surface, side and end lines should be indicated by substantial posts set firmly into the ground.

Posts should also be erected in the approximate center of both the side and end lines. Thus the completely staked claim should have besides the discovery —or so-called center posts—eight other determining posts. Within sixty days of discovery, the locators must perform enough excavating or preliminary work clearly to show ten feet of the lode or more in depth. Within ninety days after discovery, the claim should be recorded at the office of the clerk of the county in which it lies. Additional facts concerning location and description of the vicinity must be recorded reasonably to identify the ground. The recording fee is one dollar and twenty-five cents.

The formalities of staking a placer claim are similar, with the exception of the fact that, instead of a tract one thousand five hundred feet by six hundred feet, a twenty-acre section of land may be staked out. If the placer claim is located on unsurveyed ground, it may be in any shape necessitated by the topography of the country. If in surveyed ground, it must conform to certain legal sub-divisions established by the government.

What field will women try next? Here's an inquiry from a woman who wants to try prospecting herself.

WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE: Two other girls and myself are planning a coast-to-coast motor trip. We are all healthy, fond of the outdoors, and eager to try our hand in California at a business heretofore generally confined to the male of the species—prospecting. We intend to look for gold chiefly, but will keep an eye peeled for signs of any of the rare metals. One of the girls has had several years study of geology at college. Can you tell us if there is any law against a woman's taking a gold claim in the United States? B. W.
Portland, Maine.

More power to B. W. and her girl friends. No, there is no law to hinder a woman's staking a claim in her own right, providing that she is or has announced her formal declaration of becoming a citizen of the United States. Write again B. W. Let us know how you get along.

J. F., from St. Paul, Minnesota, says that, all of his life, he has been a prospector at heart and now wants to strike out for the diggings. Cold doesn't bother him, he says. He wants to know what

a man's chances are to-day in and about the famous old Dawson City gold fields.

To J. F.—Mining in Dawson and within a fifty-mile radius of the great boom town has been divided into three phases. First the primitive, where a lone prospector, or a team of partners went into the rich land, and could earn a modest fortune with a simple pan and shovel. That phase is over. Secondly the mechanical stage of operations, where sluice-boxes and small hydraulic outfits, run by few men and little capital, could operate to a pretty profit. That stage, too, is practically gone. Thirdly, came the day of large corporations, big dredges, and expensive machinery. The fields immediately surrounding Dawson have passed partially through this stage also, though there is still a valuable area left, which will keep the available plants, both dredging and hydraulic, occupied for many years. That's about the size of the situation, J. F., if you care to try your luck at it.

MORE VISITORS TO NATIONAL PARKS

TRAVEL to the national parks and monuments reached the highest figure in their history, with a total of 2,314,905 visitors during the season of 1926. As compared with the preceding year, the number of visitors increased by 260,343, a gain of twelve per cent.

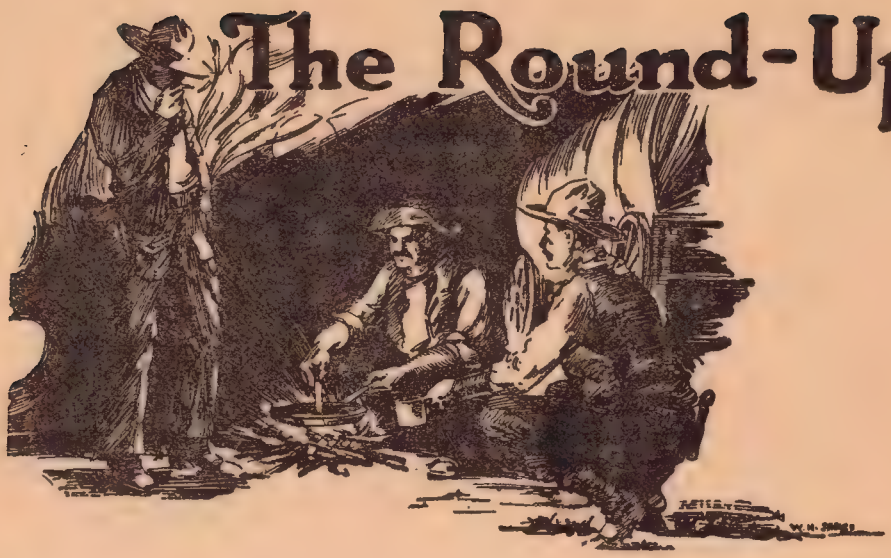
Adjustment of boundaries occurred in several of the national parks during the year, increasing the areas available for visitors. Especially noteworthy was the enlargement of the Sequoia Park in California by the inclusion of Mount Whitney, the highest mountain in the continental United States, and the scenic Kern River. During the year, an arrangement was made with the Bureau of Public Roads of the department of agriculture to supervise major road projects, thus avoiding duplication of engineering work by the department in handling this work. Already four and a half million dollars has been expended under the road budget in several national parks, while obligations amounting to one million and a half have been entered into. Under the authorization of Congress, a total of seven and a half million dollars is to be expended in the improvement of roads and trails throughout the national parks.

A DESERT MYSTERY

A CURIOUS find on the desert near Barstow, California, has given rise to much speculation by police officials, and it is felt that some terrible tragedy lies back of the mysterious find. Last August, a purse was found on the desert. As it contained the name of a woman resident of Quincy, Massachusetts, her brother in that city was communicated with, and he replied that his sister and her son had left Quincy for Los Angeles by automobile, but that he did not believe that they had met with any mishap.

Several weeks later, however, added significance was given to the finding of the purse by a second find of more gruesome character. This was a woman's arm which was picked up near the spot where the purse had been found by officers. Although they searched for other portions of the body from which the arm had been severed, their quest was without result, nor could they discover any further clew to the mystery.

The Round-Up



THERE begins in this week's issue a department called Potlatch. It is devoted to mines and mining. It is conducted by a man experienced in that line. His name is J. A. Thompson. Is there anything more elusive, romantic, fascinating, delightful, and interesting than finding gold—or any less precious metal, as far as that goes? Also, a black diamond is no mean thing to drive your pick into. Any of you who are interested in finding uncoined money lying on or underneath the surface, read this department and write freely, too, if there is anything you want to know.

Just listen to A. K. Barrows:

"HOWDY, BOSS AND FOLKS: Reckon as how you-all been wondering where I was keepin' myself, so thought I'd lope over and say 'howdy' to-night. If some one of you hombres will pass the makin's I shore would admire same, bein' as mine got wet in the shower I just rode through.

"Well, Boss, I shore would like to meet up with the hombre who was spieling here a few nights back in regards to hosses. I just can't recall his moniker, but you-all will know who I mean. The hombre who was a-tellin' 'bout using iron weights an' a black snake to handle his broncs.

"I don't doubt but what he may get results, but he shore is talkin' through his hat when he says a skinner can't get results no other way. He has his broncs scared of him all right, but I've seen broncs who would only be waitin' their chance to catch him off guard, and then they would get him very pronto. I know some of the best freighters in Montana, and they don't have to use no iron weights to break their strings with. Bangin' a bronc side of the head with a hunk of iron ain't goin' to do nuthin' but make him plumb ornery. I've handled a few broncs in my time shore 'nuff, when nuthin' but spurs and a quirt will do the trick, but the less rough stuff you use the better you will get along with the bronc after he is broke.

"I'm goin' to tell you hombres about what happened to one of the best bronc peelers in Wyoming. He took on a bronc to bust for himself. It was known to be an outlaw and killer. It had a trick of goin' over backward if it couldn't throw a rider any other way.

Well, Jack said as how he would cure the bronc of that. When he got into the saddle he carried a loaded quirt, and when the bronc came up to go over backward, he just hit him between the ears knocking him cold. The bronc soon quit and became a good trail hoss —to all appearances. Well, Jack rode him for four years, and he never made a false move so far as goin' over backward was concerned. Then one night Jack started for a baile, and as he reached down to strike a match to light his cigarette the bronc suddenly reared, went over backward, and crushed Jack to death. That proves what I told you-all in the beginning. Treat 'em rough and cruel, and they shore are only waiting a chance tuh get you. Well, hombres, reckon as how I'll be stoppin' now the moon's come up, as I want to make the line camp to-night."

IN NEXT WEEK'S ISSUE OF WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE

Smiling Charlie

Beginning Serial

By MAX BRAND

Enticed from his mountain lair, Smiling Charlie was brought to help a colonel save his beautiful daughter. The kind of help Charlie gave was far from what the colonel had hoped for.

Prisoners of the Glacier

A Novel

By FRANK RICHARDSON PIERCE

Gold! The lure that has ever led men to desperate risks and deadly peril. For its sake, these three adventurers, two men and a girl, followed the path of a glacier, only to find that the snow bridge behind them had caved in, leaving them in a desolate region with no means of exit.

False Change on Lazy J

By OWEN CLARKE TRELEAVEN

His old tricks were so good he didn't need to learn new ones.

AND OTHER STORIES **Order Your Copy Now**

"The little Hollow Tree badge friendmaker will go with me through life," says Seldon C. Peeples, of Fulton, Kentucky.

You don't want to be without one, folks. Send twenty-five cents in stamps or coin to The Hollow Tree, Western Story Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City, and state whether you want the button style for your coat lapel, or the pin.

Miss Helen Rivers, who conducts this department, will see to it that you will be able to make friends with other readers, though thousands of miles may separate you. It must be understood that Miss Rivers will undertake to exchange letters only between men and men, boys and boys, women and women, girls and girls. Letters will be forwarded direct when correspondents so wish; otherwise they will be answered here. Be sure to inclose forwarding postage when sending letters through The Hollow Tree.

THE Owl and I take a great interest in the "youngsters" of The Hollow Tree crowd. Not a day goes by that we do not find many scrawled-up envelopes in the old Holla—chirography of wide-awake, knowledge-seeking youngsters from twelve to fifteen years of age. All of these letters voice inquiries of some sort—if it is only to ask the question: "Am I too young to belong to The Hollow Tree Gang?" Young people have an insatiable desire to ask questions, and we believe, the Owl and I, that just as much consideration should be paid these little men and women as is extended to their elders. Gangsters, please don't discourage the young people when they write to you. Even though they may fill up their letters with questions!

Here's a youngster who will have learned a lot by the time he is twenty. Who will come forward with the information he wants?

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I am twelve years old, and am wondering whether I am too young to be admitted or not. Would you kindly put me in touch with some one who knows how to tan rattlesnake skins?

JACK FAIL.

P. O. Box 715, Price, Utah.

Driggs, of Bar D, would have a word with you, folks.

DEAR MISS RIVERS AND GANG: I hope that there is room for another member. I have been reading the WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE for four years, and I think that it is one of the best outfits on the range! I was born on a ranch—Bar D is my father's brand—and lived there until about seven years ago. I'm looking forward to the spring, when I'll go back there to the good old range.

On the Golden State, Limited, going to Omaha, I saw a Hollow Tree pin on a young fellow; and I made up my mind then and there to corral one for myself, which I surely have done. I'm out for pen pals now, and hope to corral a few of them before long.

DRIGGS, OF BAR D.

Care of The Tree.

The Roamin' Kid, from Canada.

DEAR GANG: Hello, folks! I live way out here in British Columbia, but it's all very beautiful, and I don't think that I'd care to live anywhere else except, maybe, Texas. Say, folks, I wonder if any of you have experienced the same thrill that I do when I hear people speak of Texas. Just the sound of it makes me want to pick up my "pack" and tear off for that big, colorful State. One of the ambitions of my life is to know a real cowboy; and some day I'm going to find one for a real pal. In the meantime,

won't every one write? I wish luck to all of you on the trail.

THE ROAMIN' KID.

Care of The Tree.

An old-timer at seventeen.

DEAR MISS RIVERS AND GANG: I'm a suntanned, seventeen-year-old boy with lots of Kentucky blood in me, although I was born in Indiana. I have had eight years' experience in trapping and hunting—I was only six when I started that life. I have since spent three years in Illinois, and worked on one of the largest farms in the central part of the State, where I learned to ride and rope. I'll be glad to hear from all who want to drop me a line, and will especially enjoy hearing from those who love the life on a farm.

PAUL NEAL.

R. R. 2, Forrest, Illinois.

From the New Hampshire hills.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I wonder if you will let a lonely New England boy join your circle? I haven't much chance to make friends, as my work requires me to stay in the mountains. I am an electrical-power-plant engineer, and the plant is situated quite some distance outside of town.

I am only twenty years old, without friends, and with a great longing for friendship. Won't some one write and let me tell him about our New Hampshire hills?

WARREN CARR.

Box 595, Lincoln, New Hampshire.

Fort Bragg, California is heard from.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: Although I'm quite young in years—only seventeen, in fact—I've got about a great deal. I was born on a ranch, and my love of the outdoors has always remained with me. I am a native of California, but I have experienced the intense cold—where you earn your right to live—as well as the heat of the South.

I'm on the trail of pen pals, folks, so won't some of you be good enough to meet me halfway?

WILLARD BEADLEY.

Box 662, Fort Bragg, Mendocino County, California.

Here's a cheerful hombre, folks.

DEAR FELLOWS OF THE HOLLOW TREE GANG: Am twenty-one years old, and so far I've managed to laugh and smile my way through life, and have done a pretty good job of it, at that. I'm wondering if I can smile my way into the heart of your Hollow Tree camp, boys? Here's hoping that I can, for I am pretty idle these days—what with a "busted" arm and all, and will have plenty of time to read your letters. I have a good friend who has promised to do my writing for me until I am able to answer your communications myself—that is, if I get any—so just come ahead, you fellows, and I'll exchange snaps with any or all of you who write.

J. S. BLEVENS.

3530 Parker Avenue, Detroit, Michigan.

"I have been in China for two years and will be unable to get back to the States before next summer. I am a soldier, twenty-four, and very lonesome," says Corporal J. A. McCrosky, Co. G., 15 Inf., Tientsin, China. Send him some cheerful letters, folks.

Lauren Brandon, 409 Manatee Ave., Arcadia, Fla., is looking for new correspondents and is interested in trading "precancels," both United States and foreign.

A would-be farmer.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: How many of you like to talk farming? Oh, as many as that! That's splendid! I was reared on a farm, but left it for the army, and served twenty-two months—eleven of them overseas. Like many of the boys, I came back and married the girl who waited for me, and now we are hoping to get back to a farm and make good.

I want some of you fellows interested in farming to write to me. I should like to know of a place where I could get a start as "share worker." I can't farm on my own hook just yet, so want a year or two with a good plantation or individual farm owner who will give me a chance to stick and make good.

At present I'm working as a pipefitter, and would be willing to go West and work at that trade for a time, if there was an opening there that any one would tell me about.

Like many other ex-service men, I find that my lungs are weak, and I want to go West in time to avoid any serious trouble. Mrs. Fortner and I will be looking for some cheerful news from all of you.

J. H. FORTNER.

Bastrop, Louisiana.

Gangsters wishing to write or exchange snapshots with a lonesome mer-

chant marine sailor, write Jack Chester Hart, 25 South Street, New York City. This Gangster is interested in amateur photography.

Another sailor.

DEAR GANG: I'm just another American sailor wishing to exchange letters and snaps with any one caring to write. I am an experienced trapper, big-game hunter, and as hardy a specimen as the Northwest ever produced! HELMER N. DAHL.

Care of U. S. S. *Idaho*, San Francisco, California.

Albertus C. Tegart, Jr., 192 Millburn Street, Rochester, N. Y., is a sixteen-year-old motor cycle rider who wants to hear from enthusiasts around his own age or older. He will exchange snapshots with those who write.

A girl from the Gopher State.

DEAR GANG: Just a few lines from a State in the north-central division of the United States. I hail from Minnesota—better known as the Gopher State, on account of its being infested by so many of the little animals of that name. My home is in the Flour City—Minneapolis—the greatest flour center in the world. The celebrated Falls of St. Anthony are in the heart of the city.

I have traveled through half of the United States, and have spent ten months in Los Angeles, so am prepared to give long accounts of interesting places to all who write. I'm hoping for a "downpour" of letters. I'm seventeen years old. ETHEL HARRIS.

2814 Morgan Avenue, N., Minneapolis, Minnesota.

Another Gangster from Minnesota.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I live in northern Minnesota, about twenty miles from Red Lake and the Chippewa Indian Reservation. This part of the State was formerly a great lumbering section, but now almost all of the timber is cut, and the logging companies are leaving. I'm a senior in high school, have never traveled much, but could tell quite a bit about the Indians, or this part of the country to any one interested. I love to ride horseback. My home is on a farm. DAISY.

Care of The Tree.

A Would-be Californian, in care of The Tree, is twenty-two, married, and has a little girl. She would like to hear from the sisters of The Gang who can tell her about just the sort of southern California hill home that she has been dreaming of having some day. "I am a private secretary by profession, but I'd be a farmer if I could," writes this little lady.

"I want a souvenir from every land," says Hazel E. Richmond, Box 594, Mt. Hope, West Virginia. "I don't care if it is nothing more than just a pebble, seashell, or pressed leaf. Won't you foreign Gangsters please come forward?"

Will this little Gangster send the Old Holla her address so that the Big Sister can send her mail to her? Now, Gangsters, don't forget to put your address —on every letter you write.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I'm only a little cowgirl, sixteen, but I'd like powerful well to be a Gangster. Like most ranch girls, I love animals, and, of course, horses best. Won't some one tell me all about trick riding and roping?

I live on a large ranch near Pendleton, but am just rambling around now with my brother. I guess we are regular tumbleweeds.

BLUE BLAZES.

Care of The Tree.

Campers, this may interest you.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: We are two camp cooks, my wife and I, looking for a lot of hungry boys to feed. Now, you lumberjacks, if you are hooked up with a camp that needs a couple of good cooks, drop us a line. We'll show you some good chuck if you do!

HARRY B. DALTON.

General Delivery, Sioux City, Iowa.

Looking for a partner.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: This is my second visit to The Hollow Tree. I am a disabled veteran of the World War, and am looking for a partner to go into a poultry and stock-raising ranch with me. He would have to be a pal who would like the great out-of-doors, and one who would not be afraid of farm work and ranch life.

I would also like to hear from boys of the Ninth Aero Squadron, A. E. F.

CHARLES D. FAY.

Belleville, Michigan.

WHERE TO GO AND HOW TO GET THERE

By John North

It is our aim in this department to be of genuine practical help and service to those who wish to make use of it. Don't hesitate to write to us and give us the opportunity of assisting you to the best of our ability.

Address all communications to John North, care of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

RIVERS OF THE WEST—THE ARKANSAS

IN the heights of the Rocky Mountains in central Colorado, the Arkansas River has its source in a lake over ten thousand feet above sea level. Its total length is 1,500 miles and it is navigable for nearly seven hundred. Beginning as a narrow stream, it winds its way through deep cañons, gaining in impetus and in size as it flows, plunging down the mountainsides in picturesque waterfalls and magnificent cascades, rushing through cañon after cañon until it reaches the Grand Cañon of the Arkansas.

Here it enters the Royal Gorge, whose steep walls confine it in a narrow space, and the rushing waters roar through the rocky precipices, rising over two thousand feet above the river bed, the overhanging crags and boulders cutting off the sunlight and adding to the weirdness of the scene. The noise of the river as it thunders and roars over its rocky course imparts a feeling of fear and awe as one gazes down the terrifying depth of the slopes and sees the narrow, turbulent stream tearing its way through the granite cliffs.

The bed of this restless river is one of the most varied that can possibly be imagined. Once it leaves the mountains, it is apt to go almost anywhere. After being held in place by the stupendous cliffs, the Arkansas emerges onto the lowlands of Colorado and spreads out into a shallow stream that wanders here and there over stretches of sand and clay and loam for nearly fifteen hundred miles. It overflows its banks occasionally and, as it subsides, it makes a new channel for itself, leaving miles of swamp land behind.

Not so many years ago, only the very adventurous could visit the Royal Gorge of the Arkansas, and they accomplished the feat after many weary months of travel with knapsack and stick. Now it is possible to view this wonderful sight from a comfortable Pullman seat on the trains of the Denver & Rio Grande Railway. Cañon City, Colorado, is the starting point for the trip

through the Royal Gorge of the Arkansas.

This far-famed defile is the rift through which the Arkansas River finally bursts from the mountains to freedom and the plains below. The confining ramparts rise in solid, unscalable walls. Gigantic masses of rock and tremendous boulders have loosened their hold on the cliffs and fallen into or near the rushing river, exciting expressions of wonder from all who see them. A roadbed has been built for the track out from the wall along which the train glides close to the river, the route narrowing until, at the Hanging Bridge, the passage is not more than ten yards wide, while on either side the perpendicular granite cliffs raise their heads three thousand feet into the air.

Another wonderful trip may be made to the top of the Royal Gorge from Cañon City over the Sky-Line Drive and the road to the top of the gorge, which is reached after a drive of eight miles. Right upon the brink of the mighty chasm, one may look down the tremendous depth upon the river and track below, while above stretches the broad expanse of plain and valley on one side and on the other the forested slopes and snow-covered peaks of the Continental Divide, where the Arkansas River begins its course and cuts its way down to lower levels.

This erratic stream flows east to Kansas, and, after taking a southeasterly course of one hundred and forty miles, it bends sharply to the north, forming the Great Bend. It then flows southeast across Oklahoma and Arkansas to the Mississippi, where it vies with White River as to the point at which it shall merge with the "Father of the Waters," and frequently using the other's channel at high-water time.

The drainage area of the Arkansas is 177,500 square miles. Its principal branches are the Cimarron and Canadian Rivers. In Colorado 500,000 acres on the Arkansas and its tributaries are under irrigation.

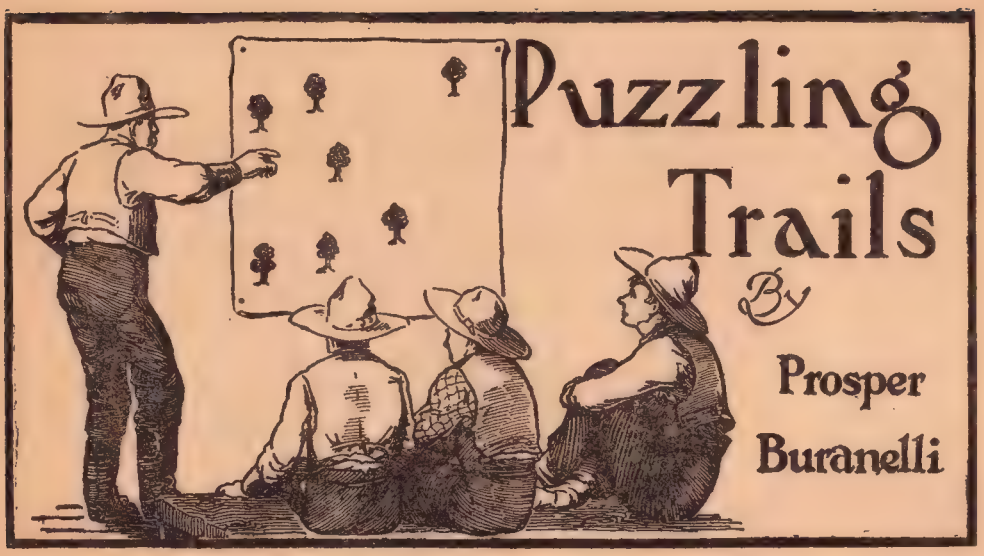
TO WORK ON DAM CONSTRUCTION

DEAR MR. NORTH: I am thinking of going to Arizona, and should like to know my chances of getting work on the construction of the new Coolidge Dam. Will you please let me know if this would be possible, and how to go about it? What will the work consist of? N. P.

Los Angeles, California.

At this writing, sealed bids for the construction of the Coolidge Dam are under consideration by the Indian bureau. Probably a few weeks will elapse before the contract for the work will be awarded to the successful bidder. I think a good way for you to keep track of the progress of the transactions would be to make occasional inquiry at the district office of the Indian Irrigation Service, at 311 Federal Building, in your city. For the unskilled labor, it is likely that a good many of the Pima Indians of the Gila River Indian reservation will be employed. For more skilled workers, the contractor may go to Phoenix, Los Angeles, and other cities, enlisting the services of the employment agencies. When you learn the name and address of the successful contractors, I'd suggest getting in touch with them by letter or personal application and making your wishes known.

According to announcements from government sources, some of the tasks to be done on the Coolidge Dam include the excavation of about 26,000 cubic yards of earth, sand, and gravel; the excavation of 14,000 cubic yards of rock in the river bed; the stripping of the cañon's sides and spillway excavation, involving 195,000 cubic yards of material, and the placing of about 4,500,000 pounds of reënforcing steel. You see it's quite a big task, and there ought to be room for a whole lot of workers once it gets under way.



Puzzling Trails

By Prosper Buranelli

After the Round-up is over, each week Prosper Buranelli will select for readers of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE a couple of tricky problems that will make them get out their pencils and go to it. What kind of puzzle do you like the best? Write and tell us. Send in a puzzle and show us. Maybe you can concoct the one that will make WESTERN STORY readers quit cold.

A RANCHER had a square plot of ground on which were seven trees.

"Now, look here, boys," he said to his cow hands. "I want to divide up this plot with three fences so that there will be seven inclosures and so that there is a tree in each inclosure. I want you to show me how to do it. Draw three straight lines through the square so that they will make seven inclosures, each with a tree in it."

Can you help the cow hands out?

George J. West sends in a cryptic city. Remember that kind of thing? If you see "My first is in HAM but not in SAM," you will know that the first letter of the answer is H.

My first is in SEASON but not in REMAIN.

My second is in TAMES but not in SEEMS.

My third is in NOTICE but not in PERCEIVE.

My fourth is in ANT but not in NIT.

My fifth is in OCEAN but not in SEA.

My sixth is in TIMIDITY but not in MISGIVING.

My seventh is in LONG but not in LINE.

My eighth is in NEVER but not in SEVERITY.

My ninth is in IDIOT but not in FOOL.

My tenth is in ONSET but not in ATTACKS.

Now here's an enigma. You must be used to these by now. I say—3—9—6: Feline. And you guess CAT. Then you write in the letters above the corresponding numbers beneath. Go to it. The answer is part of the refrain of a

song popular during the Civil War—and still in use.

17—21: Preposition.
8—7—20—3—11: Luster.
18—10—18: Adult males.
4—6—15—1: Like.
16—5—13—14: Rime.
2—19—9: To go into (obs.).

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21

Word forms take various shapes. There are word squares, triangles, pyramids, diamonds. In all, as in the cross-word puzzle, there are readings across and down. Here is a triangle. It reads the same across and down. Guess the words defined, and build the form.

Letter of the alphabet.
Exist.
Horn (French).
Brazilian seaport.
Jeweler's measure of weight.
Salt of boron.
Scolded.

Let's go off on a tour of the world, through twenty-eight countries. You will find them in the square. You begin at any letter for any name and spell the name by moving to adjoining letters. I give this as a neat example of the spell-out square.

LAST WEEK'S ANSWERS:

■	M	U	S	T	A	N	G	■
B	■	T	E	R	M	I	T	E
R	O	T	■	U	I	T	■	Q
O	B	E	Y	E	D	■	D	U
N	O	R	A	■	S	E	R	I
C	L	■	R	A	T	T	A	N
H	E	A	R	T	■	A	G	E
O	■	D	O	O	R	■	G	S
■	C	O	W	P	O	N	Y	■

FEWER FULL-BLOODED OSAGES

RECENT investigations show that the number of full-blooded Osage Indians is largely on the decrease. Each succeeding generation of this famous tribe is becoming more and more mingled with the white race, so that, at last accounts, there were only six hundred full-blooded Osages on the tribal rolls, out of a total of two thousand signatures or marks.

The Osages are the wealthiest Indians of the West. Their reservation in the Osage Hills country was originally a fine place for them to erect their tepees and graze their cattle, but of late years, oil has been found on the reservation, and vast fortunes have accrued to the Indians from royalties.

MISSING

This department conducted in duplicate in DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE and WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE, thus giving readers double service, is offered free of charge to our readers. Its purpose is to aid them in getting in touch with persons of whom they have lost track.

While it will be better to use your name in the notice, we will print your request "blind" if you prefer. In sending "blind" notices, you must, of course, give us your right name and address, so that we can forward promptly any letters that may come for you. We reserve the right to reject any notice that seems to us unsuitable. Because "copy" for a magazine must go to the printer long in advance of publication, don't expect to see your notice till a considerable time after you send it.

If it can be avoided, please do not send us a "General Delivery" post-office address, for experience has proved that these persons who are not specific as to address often have mail that we send them returned to us marked "not found." It would be well, also, to notify us of any change in your address.

Now, readers, help those whose friends or relatives are missing, as you would like to be helped if you were in a similar position.

WARNING.—Do not forward money to any one who sends you a letter or telegram, asking for money "to get home," et cetera, until you are absolutely certain that the author of such telegram or letter is the person you are seeking.

CLEM.—Please let me hear from you. Is it true? Do you understand? B. H., care of this magazine.

RANDELL, HUGH.—I worked with him in the woods near Sandpoint, Idaho, during 1907. He formerly came from Michigan. An old friend would like to hear from you. S. E. Smith, Box 136, Grayling, Michigan.

STANTON, CLARA and **CLAUDE.**—Please write to your niece, Leona. Will say nothing to any one. Was married last November. Mrs. G. V. McDow, Reubens, Idaho.

JACK.—I want you. Baby Gloria has been ill, and we need you. L., care of this magazine.

COYNE, Mrs. MACK.—Any one knowing her whereabouts will kindly notify Mrs. J. M. S., care of this magazine.

WYSONG, WAYNE.—He was last heard of in Troop H in Honolulu in 1921. His home is supposed to be in Illinois. Please write to Joe Gagnon, 526 Springfield, Vermont.

BATES, WILLIAM L.—He is called "Whitey," has blond hair, blue eyes, and is thirty-two years of age. Formerly came from Henderson, West Virginia, but was last heard from in Warren, Pennsylvania. Any one knowing his whereabouts kindly notify H. W. Bates, Coscob, Connecticut.

BARRETT, LENA.—She was formerly living in Kansas City. Any one who can give any information of her present whereabouts will kindly notify Earl Fink, 200 East 4th Street, Picher, Oklahoma.

VAN ERT, LLOYD M.—He left for North Dakota threshing fields in June, 1926. He is five feet six inches in height, has brown eyes, dark hair, and a gray spot in the back of his head. His mother is very ill and prays for his forgiveness. Please write to Rittycat, who is staying with Bessie.

HOWELL, D. D.—We are very much worried. If living, please communicate with us through M. G. R. Things will be cleared up. We love you. Miss Jonnie.

OWENS, DORIS V.—She left Gordon Keller Hospital in Tampa, Florida, in February, 1926. Her son, Albert, who is eight years old, is about to be given for adoption. E. A. M., General Delivery, Clearwater, Florida.

DEAVER.—The lady that you met last July in Monument Valley Park and accompanied you through the Van Biggle Pottery Works would like to hear from you. P. O. Box 1033, Colorado Springs, Colorado.

DALY, ANTHONY M.—Please write to me for mother's sake. I am in New York State. Tom, care of this magazine.

SIPES, NORA MAE.—Please get in touch with me or father, as we are very anxious to hear from you. Is your married name McLean? Received booklet from Avalon, California. I am married. Address Mrs. L. Pearl Sipes Sutherland, 176 East 154th Street, Harvey, Illinois.

BLACKMAN, DAN.—He was discharged at Fort Huachuca, Arizona, from the 10th Cavalry, in 1921. Your son, Leon, is very ill. Please get in touch with your home. B., 241 East 6th Street, Tucson, Arizona.

REKOWSKI or **SMITH, JOHN.**—He was last heard of thirty years ago in Guelph, Ontario, Canada. He is about sixty-five years of age. Any information will be appreciated by his brothers and sisters. Mary Rekowski, 163 Lancaster Street, East, Kitchener, Ontario, Canada.

J. C.—Write again at once and give your address, so I can answer. Sounded good. I still care. Miss Hibernate.

ANDERSON or **SCODEN, BERNHARD.**—He is about twenty-two years of age and weighs two hundred and forty pounds. Was last heard of in northern Minnesota, then living in a small town near Cromwell. Please notify S. A. Hedman, R. R. 1, Box 70, Wenatchee, Washington.

SMITH or **LEE, TOM** and **JACK.**—They are brothers to James L. Smith, who met them at Memphis, Tennessee, at the old soldiers' reunion in 1909. Any one knowing their addresses will confer a favor by writing to Mrs. Eva Martin, Box 362, Cromwell, Oklahoma.

BARRETT, JOHN THOMAS and **AMOS.**—I would like to get in touch with my father and uncle. My father may be living in Arkansas, Oklahoma, or Louisiana, while my uncle is somewhere in Arkansas. The names of his living children are Chester E., Edith B., Ora, and Lydia. Any one having any information will kindly write to Chester E. L. Barrett, 2340 South Phoenix Avenue, West Tulsa, Oklahoma.

JOHNSON, BRITTY MARTY.—Please send me your address. J. K., care of this magazine.

DAVIS, HENRY.—He was last seen in Raleigh, North Carolina, and has a brother by the name of Charlie. Everything is forgiven for the things that happened in Raleigh. Please get in touch with Edna Chisholm.

SMITH, JOE A.—He is forty-two years of age, five feet in height, has black hair and blue eyes. For some time he worked in the oil business. He was supposed to have been in Little Rock, Arkansas. Any one having any news will confer a favor by writing to Mrs. Libbie Blair, 2301 Champaign Avenue, Mattoon, Illinois.

QUAID.—Any one in Texas by this name will kindly write to a lonely old friend. M. L. P., care of this magazine.

SMITH, WILLIAM H.—Born June 10, 1900, Trenton, New Jersey. He is five feet seven inches in height, has brown hair and eyes, a slight cast in his left eye, and weighs one hundred and fifty pounds. He was a fireman in the navy and was last heard of on the U. S. S. "Kittery." Please send all information to Henry Mills, 611 East 137th Street, New York City.

DE VINNY, PEARL.—Any one knowing her whereabouts will kindly communicate with S. H., care of this magazine.

BURSON, HARRY P.—He is five feet ten inches in height, twenty-eight years of age, and has brown hair and gray eyes. He disappeared from Fresno, California, January 1, 1926. Please write to Mrs. Anna E. Dikeman, P. O. Box 510, Akron, Ohio.

WARE, ROBERT M.—He was living in Alhambra, California, in 1919. His sister is very anxious to get in touch with him and would appreciate his present address. Ella M. Havarnale, 17 C Street, Southwest, Auburn, Washington.

BURGESS, ETHELBERT B.—In 1908 he was in Baltimore, Maryland, working for the R. M. Sutton Company. Any one knowing his whereabouts will kindly notify M. G. Mann, P. O. Box 1612, Jacksonville, Florida.

GULLENS, A. J.—He was last heard from in Galveston, Texas, and was later believed to have entered the merchant-marine service. Any one knowing his address will confer a favor by notifying Ralph D. Thissell, 267 Appleton Street, Lowell, Massachusetts.

LOY, POLLY and **JOHN,** or their descendants.—Please write to 821 Connor Avenue, Joplin, Missouri.

RALSTON, JACK, or his descendants.—Get in touch with 821 Connor Avenue, Joplin, Missouri.

SYDNEY, Mr. and **Mrs. FRANCIS JOSEPH.**—They were living in San Antonio, Texas, about four years ago, and intended to go to the Oklahoma oil fields. Any one knowing these people will kindly notify Mrs. E. W. Seely, P. O. Box 123, Parkerton, Wyoming.

LOWE, WILFRED LAWRENCE.—Last heard from May, 1926. Any information from the sailors of the U. S. S. "Mississippi" leading to his whereabouts will be greatly appreciated by his sister, Catherine Lowe, 103 Shultas Place, Hartford, Connecticut.

CHRISTIAN.—I would like to get in touch with any one by this name who left England for America about the time Charlie Peace shot Dyson. Some of the names of the relatives in Sheffield are Henry Christian, Fannie, Arthur, Annie, Charlie. John and Georgiana are now both dead. Please send all information to John, care of this magazine.

OLGA.—Please get in touch with me as soon as you see this. The Wandering Jew, care of this magazine.

FLOWERS, LOUISE.—Please write or wire me. Joe P., Box 3691, West Palm Beach, Florida.

PARKER, JOHN WILSON.—He left his wife and children in Roanoke, Virginia. Please write to your mother, as she has sad news for you. Mrs. Fred Parker, General Delivery, Waterford, Ontario, Canada.

JOHNSON, MINNIE.—Her maiden name was Sullivan. She was born at Waco, Texas, January 27, 1875. Has dark-blue eyes and dark hair. She wrote her brother, Charlie, from Fort Worth, Texas, about twenty-five years ago. Any information of her will be greatly appreciated by her sister, Maud Parker, R. 3, De Queen, Arkansas.

MORLAN, FRED.—He was last heard of in Springfield, Illinois, in 1921. His daughter is very anxious to get in touch with him. Please write to Mrs. Pearl Harshaw, 500 Cedar Street, De Soto, Missouri.

REMEY, EARL H.—His home was in Detroit, Michigan, but he was last heard of in September, 1922, in Company M, 27th Infantry, Schofield Barracks, Hawaii. Any one knowing his whereabouts will kindly communicate with V. G. Abrassart, 340 North Sixth Avenue, Kankakee, Illinois.

HILL, AUBREY F., or JOHN ED.—His little daughter, who hasn't seen her father since infancy, would like to hear from him. He has lived mostly in Missouri and Oklahoma. Please write to Mildred Hill, Lehigh, Iowa.

GERALDS, RICHARD.—Everything has been fixed up, and it is safe for you to come home. Please come at once. Martha Geralds, Englewood, Tennessee.

WARRIX or BRAY, JOHN.—He is thirty-three years of age, has brown hair, a scar on his chin, and his right hand is crippled. Please write, as there is some important news for you. T. L. Voiles, Neola, West Virginia.

PLEASIE, JONES.—He is twenty-one years old, has dark hair and eyes, and left his home in Missouri about four years ago. He has an impediment in his speech. His mother and relatives are very anxious to get in touch with him. Please write to Mrs. Clara Owens, Route B, Oroville, California.

ORLEANS, AGNES.—She was in an orphans' home in St. Louis, Missouri, twenty-eight years ago. Please write to your brother, Raymond Orleans, 1206 Liberty Street, Mexico, Missouri.

RAINEY.—Any one knowing anything in regard to the Rainey children that were placed in an orphans' home in Austin, Texas, the year of 1903 or 1904, please write to Box 92, Lexington, Texas.

WEST, BILL.—Your mother is very worried about you. Please get in touch with me as soon as you see this. Amos H. Webb, care of Phillips Ret. Company, Panhandle, Texas.

KILFARA, TOM.—He has blue eyes, brown hair, and was last heard from in Chicago, in 1925. A friend is anxious to hear from him. N. M., care of this magazine.

CLYDE, W.—Everything is o. k., and we are all well. Do let us hear from you. Mother, L. M. P.

WARRINGTON, Mrs. D. L.—I am anxious to hear from you. I wrote to Kimberly, but letters were returned. Mrs. Lola Nacomb, Str. Route, Payette, Idaho.

GOODMAN or GOODRICH, HELEN.—She moved from Newark, New Jersey, to Minnesota, about six years ago. Write to your old chum, Marguerite Carrer, 35 Niagara Street, Newark, New Jersey.

BEVINS, WILLARD ELBERT.—He joined the Sparks Circus about a year ago. He is five feet in height, seventeen years old, has light hair, blue eyes, and a light complexion. His mother is worried and would like to hear from him. Mrs. Harley Bevins.

DODGE, ANNE ELDRIDGE.—She was last heard of in December, 1925, in Butte, Montana. Please write to Alice Towner McKay, Bray, California.

MACK, WILLIAM.—Twenty-six years ago, my mother, Anna Abelson, divorced him. I was then five years old. At that time he owned a restaurant in Fresno, California. Any information about him, dead or alive, will be appreciated by his son. Albert Kranes, 70 Foxall Street, Brooklyn, New York.

BOHANAN, MOSES.—He was living at 513 5th Avenue, South, Great Falls, Montana, in 1923. Please notify S. H., care of this magazine.

HICKERSON, HAROLD D.—He was last heard of in Missouri and Arlington, Kentucky, about five years ago. Is now twenty-seven years of age, has blue eyes and light brown hair. Any one knowing his present whereabouts kindly write to Miss Louise Tackett, 128 East Front Street, Newport, Kentucky.

MASON, ELBRIDGE.—He is about five feet in height, has dark hair and eyes, and was in Washington, D. C., about two years ago. Please write to your mother, who is anxious to see you. Mrs. A. A. Mason, 2101 31st Street and 10th Avenue, Tampa, Florida.

KIRKPATRICK, ALVA BYRON.—I have a business proposition for you. Please communicate with me through this magazine. R. F. K.

O'FLAHERTY, MARGARET T.—She has been or is now married, and is probably living around Chicopee Falls or Springfield, Massachusetts. Her cousin would appreciate her present address. Henry O'Connor, Civil Engineer, 1153 Guerrero Street, San Francisco, California.

SKLEPIK, VINCENT.—He is thirty-one years of age, and his left arm is cut off. Was living in Florida, but is believed to be in San Francisco, California. Please write to Max Sklepik, Q. M. C., Camp Gaillard, Canal Zone.

BURKHART, ED.—If you remember the people you traveled with from California, and then left at El Paso, Texas, while you went on to Allentown, Pennsylvania, write to Mickey, in care of this magazine.

SIMMONS, C. E.—Please write me your address as soon as you see this. S. W. S. M., care of this magazine.

CRENSHAW, LEHI S., or STOVAL, DANIEL, O. S.—They were formerly musicians in the United States army. An old friend, who was with them in 1923 and 1924 at Camp Lewis, Washington, is anxious to get in touch with them. Donald S. Crum, P. O. Box 174, Fort Douglas, Utah.

FLOYD.—Received letter and will forgive you. G. S.

GENE T.—"Gigolo," October 5th, Million Dollar, Los Angeles, H. W. F., care of this magazine.

LUKE, WILLIAM H.—He was formerly of the A. E. F. with the 324th Supply Company, Quartermaster's Corps. When last heard from he was living in Detroit, Michigan. Please write to your old buddy. Oscar L. Merrill, 223 11th Avenue, East, Duluth, Minnesota.

LENTZ, JULIAN.—He is the son of Ludwig and Augusta Lentz. Left the city of Racanow at the age of nineteen years to visit his uncle, William Haze, in Pennsylvania, and has not been seen since. His sister is anxious to get in touch with him, and would appreciate his present whereabouts. Zannette Lentz, 1228 North 54th Street, Birmingham, Alabama.

HAMPTON, MYRON, formerly of Everett, Washington, but last heard of at Butte, Montana. He is sixteen years old, five feet eleven inches in height. Any one who knows him will kindly notify Frank A. Collier, 2811 Victor Place, Everett, Washington.

WOOD, RAYMOND.—He was enlisted in the army when he was seventeen years old, and one time was at Camp Custer. His brothers and sisters have not seen him since he was five years of age. Please write to Archie E. Wood, 608 South 13th Street, Escanaba, Michigan.

KADES, JOSEPH.—He has been missing for three years. Any information about him may be sent to G. F. Dana, 56 Gorham Avenue, Highwood, Connecticut.

PURDY, ANNA MAY.—She was in O'Neil, Nebraska, September, 1896, but was supposed to have left for Denver, Colorado. Please write to your old schoolmate, Mrs. Letha Lennon Robinson, Limaville, Ohio.

FIELDING or MONTROSS, CELIA.—She is five feet four inches in height, thirty-eight years of age, has light-brown hair, hazel-green eyes. Your oldest daughter, Flossie, would like to hear from you. Mrs. M. A. Anayax, 2172 Logan Avenue, San Diego, California.

PECK, JOSEPH.—When last seen he wore a blue suit, gray cap, and black oxfords. He is about six feet four inches in height, has dark hair and blue eyes. He was to go from Philadelphia to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; from there to Seattle, Washington, and then on to Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. He has been missing for two years. His mother is ill and would like to see him. Please write to your sister. Elizabeth M. Peck, 101 River Street, Hudson Falls, New York.

GRIMES, CARL.—He is sixteen years of age, five feet nine inches in height, has dark-brown hair, black eyes, and weighs one hundred and forty pounds. He left his home on October 17, 1926. His mother is heartbroken and would appreciate any information as to his present whereabouts. Mrs. Anna F. Grimes, P. O. Box 1593, Comfton, California.

LOVE, RAY R.—He was last seen in Vincennes, Indiana. He is five feet eleven inches in height, has light hair, blue eyes. Please write to your wife, who needs you. Esta M. Love, 537 South 2d Street, Louisville, Kentucky.

LINZY, ETHEL or LORRINE.—She disappeared from Muskogee, Oklahoma, September 10, 1926. She is nineteen years of age, five feet six inches in height, has black hair, blue eyes, light complexion, and weighs one hundred and thirty-five pounds. A pal is anxious to hear from you. B. M. A., care of this magazine.

GELTY, BILLIE or HAZEL.—Any one knowing her whereabouts please notify A. McDonald, 219 Washington Street, Binghamton, New York.

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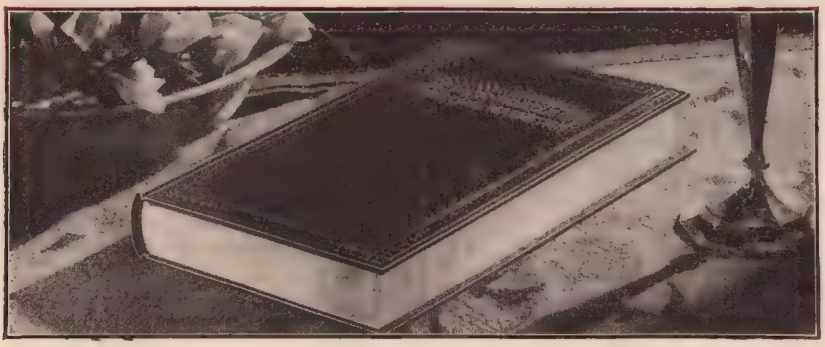

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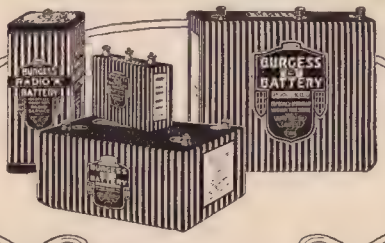

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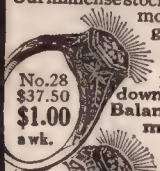

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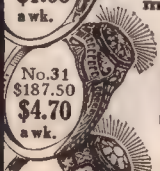

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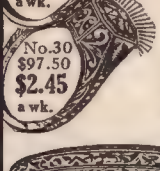

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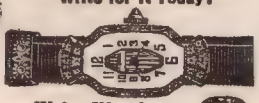

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14-K white gold hand engraved case. Fancy wing ends. Silver dial. High grade 15-Jewel movement, $25. $2.50 down and **$1.00** a wk.

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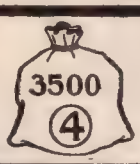

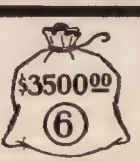

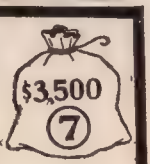

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Here's a—NEW—puzzle. If you're a puzzle fan—CAN YOU FIND THE TWIN BAGS? NO, they're not all alike—even though they look alike. Only two of these bags are identical in every way. Some have the $ sign, others not; some have one line under penny ciphers some two lines, some have comma between the 3 and 5, some have two tie strings, some none, some one string out to left, others to right. Each one is different from the rest except two—find them—mark them with a cross—send your answer. $3000.00 first prize—399 others, and duplicate prizes in case of ties. If you find the twin bags I will give you 8000 points toward first prize and tell you how to get additional easy 1000 points that wins—only 9000 points wins the $3000.00. **$500.00 Extra for Promptness**—making total first prize YOU CAN WIN $3500.00. SEND NO MONEY—nothing to buy now or ever—just find the twin bags—mark them and answer today.

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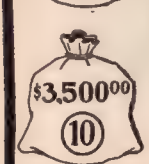

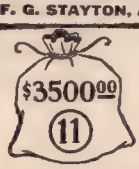

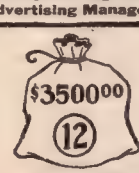

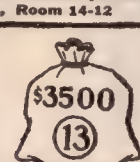

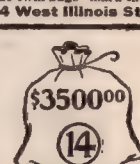

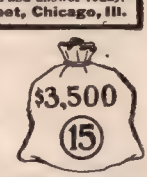

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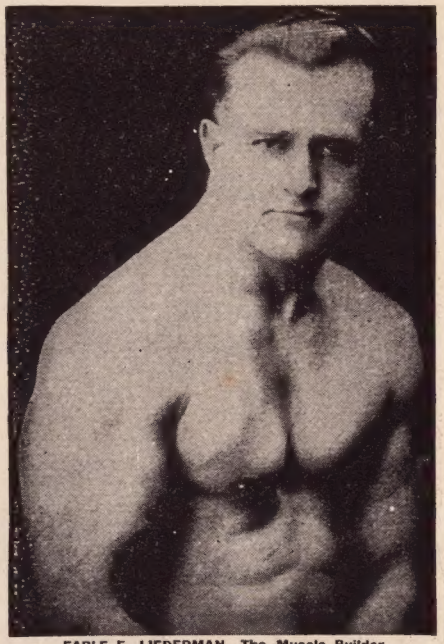

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Author of "Muscle Building," "Science of Wrestling," "Secrets of Strength," "Here's Health," "Endurance," etc.

KILL THIS MAN!

THERE'S a devil inside of you. He's trying to kill you Look out for him! He tells you not to work so hard. What's the use? the boss only piles more work on you. He tells you not to bother with your body. If you're weak—you always will be weak. Exercise is just a lot of rot. Do you recognize him? Of course you do. He's in us all. He's a murderer of ambition. He's a liar and a fool. **Kill him!** If you don't, he will kill you.

Saved

Thank your lucky stars you have another man inside of you. He's the human dynamo. He fills you full of pep and ambition. He keeps you alive—on fire. He urges you on in your daily tasks. He makes you strive for bigger and better things to do. He makes you crave for life and strength. He teaches you that the weak fall by the wayside, but the strong succeed. He shows you that exercise builds live tissue—live tissue is muscle—muscle means strength—strength is power. Power brings success! That's what you want, and gosh darn your old hide! you're going to get it.

Which Man Will It Be?

It's up to you. Set your own future. You want to be the Human Dynamo? Fine! Well, let's get busy. That's where I come in. That's my job. Here's what I'll do for you:

In just 30 days I'll increase your arm one full inch with real live, animated muscle. Yes, and I'll add two inches to your chest in the same time. Pretty good, eh? That's nothing. Now come the works. I'll build up your shoulders. I'll deepen your chest. I'll strengthen your whole body. I'll give you arms and legs like pillars. I'll literally pack muscle up your stomach and down your back. Meanwhile I'll work on those inner muscles surrounding your vital organs. You'll feel the thrill of life shooting up your old backbone and throughout your entire system. You'll feel so full of life you will shout to the world, "I'm a man and I can prove it!" Sounds good, what? But listen! That isn't all. I'm not just promising these things. **I guarantee them!** It's a sure bet. Oh, boy! Let's ride.

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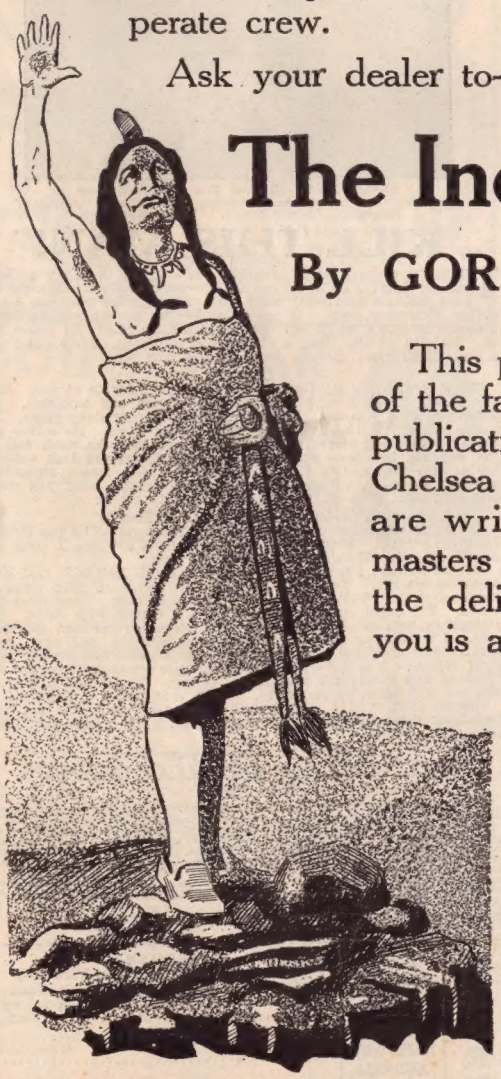

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